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Negotiating Home and Hybridity

Survival and unhomeliness in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness*

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ABSTRACT

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastelen Margaret Atwoodin 1970-luvulla esille nostaman selviytymistematiikan esiintymistä kanadalaisessa nykynaiskirjallisuudessa. Tutkimuksen aineistona on kaksi vähemmistönäkökulmasta Kanadaa tarkastelevaa romaania, Eden Robinsonin *Monkey Beach* sekä Miriam Toewsin *A Complicated Kindness*. Sen lisäksi, että etsin intertekstuaalisia elementtejä jotka liittävät teokset kanadalaiseen kirjalliseen perinteeseen, vertaan teoksia tarkemmin myös kahteen 1970-luvun alun tunnettuun romaaniin, Margaret Atwoodin teokseen *Surfacing* sekä Alice Munron teokseen *Lives of Girls and Women*.

Kuten Atwoodin temaattinen tutkimus *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature,* tutkielmassa tarkastelemani naiskirjailijoiden teokset haastavat hegemonisia, imperialistisia diskursseja, ja kuuluvat näin ollen jälkikolonialistisen kritiikin ja kirjallisuuden perinteeseen. Tämä liittää romaanit Homi K. Bhabhan teoriaan siitä, miten jälkikolonialistinen subjekti ilmenee hybridinä kirjallisissa teoksissa hetkinä, jolloin käsitys minuudesta ja kodista yksityisenä tilana osoittautuu epävakaaksi sen vuoksi, että sitä määrittävät pitkälti myös poliittiset ja julkiset diskurssit. Temaattisten yhteneväisyyksien etsimisen lisäksi tutkin siis sitä, näyttäytyykö Kanada kotina näissä naiskirjailijoiden romaaneissa epävakaana referenttinä Bhabhan *unhomeliness*- ja hybriditeetti-käsitteitä vastaavalla tavalla.

Tutkimuksessa oletukseni siitä, että Atwoodin esille nostamat kanadalaiselle kirjallisuudelle tyypilliset teemat olisivat edelleen nähtävissä nykynaiskirjailijoiden teoksissa, osoittautuu paikkansa pitäväksi. Lisäksi Kanada näyttäytyy romaaneissa Bhabhan esittämällä tavalla kotina, jota määrittävät edelleen kolonialismin perintö ja kilpailevat maailmankuvat, sekä romaanien päähenkilöt hybrideinä joiden identiteetti muodostuu kilpailevien diskurssien ja kulttuuristen vaikutteiden välimaastossa.

KEYWORDS: Canadian literature, women's writing, postcolonialism, unhomeliness, home, hybridity, survival

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1972 Margaret Atwood (18) declared that Canada as a nation was lost in 'an unknown territory,' unable to recognize 'Canada as a state of mind'. Because of its colonial victim mentality, the nation had been unable to realize its Canadianness, or form an idea of what it meant to be Canadian. The nation, according to Atwood (1972: 17–19), had overlooked its literature as an imaginary cartography to Canadianness, and was thus in need of a roadmap into itself. Such was the aim of her own study of Canadian identity and literature, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian literature*[1]. As a map into the national imaginary of a nation that was just beginning to find and define both itself and its literature, *Survival* projects rather an alarming view of what is typically Canadian: the central themes of the country's literature are, among others, death, insanity, failure and victimhood. The most important of all, however, is the theme of survival, but rather than connoting victory, the Canadian version of survival relies on succeeding not to fail or die. (Atwood 1972: 32–36, 39.)

While the first reactions to the study were enthusiastic and Canadians bought the study in great numbers, many Canadian writers and critics were disturbed by Atwood's negative account of a national identity (Schlueter 1988: 3; VanSpanckerren 1988: xxii). As the study was clearly a product of its time – the late 1960s and 1970s being an era of intense cultural nationalism in Canada – *Survival* and other studies on Canadian literature that took part in what became known as a phase of thematic criticism in Canada, written in the early 1970s, dated quickly. Being part of anti-colonial resistance to the cultural imperialism of the United States and the British Empire, most Canadian thematic criticism aimed to show that there was unity in the previously overlooked Canadian literary tradition, perhaps as a reflection of a uniquely Canadian identity. (Brown 2001; Hammill 2007: 61–62.) Today, postcolonial theorists have discarded the idea of a unitary national identity, and the current paradigm in the Canadian

[1] Subsequent references are to the 1972 Anansi Press edition. The study will be referred to as *Survival*.

postcolonial debate is the impossibility of *an* identity because of the diversity of the Canadian literary field (Redekop 2004: 265, 271; Sugars 2004a: xiii).

However, Canadians continue to associate cultural production with Canadian identity (Moss 2009), and in this age of increasing transnationalism and economic as well as cultural globalization, Canadian critics such as Russell Morton Brown (2001), Magdalene Redekop (2004), and Laura Moss (2003, 2009), to cite a few, have begun to argue for the importance of reading Canadian writing in the context of national culture and literary history. Brown (2001) suggests that the earlier thematic research could today be read both as a record and a source of cultural codes and motifs, while the postcolonial theorists Alan Lawson (2004: 160–161) and Laura Moss (2003: 7) maintain their relevance even in contemporary Canadian postcolonial discourse because of their portrayal of the Canadian settler subject.[2] As a matter of fact, what emerges from Atwood's study of Canadian literature once one sets aside the victim thematic, are depictions of alienation, non-belonging and the difficulty of adapting to the environment, be it the vast wilderness the settlers were faced with or the unwelcoming white Canadian society that the later immigrants encountered – in other words, themes and questions that, as I aim to show in the present study, are still topical in contemporary Canadian women's fiction.[3]

Furthermore, Cynthia Sugars (2004a: xiii) connects Atwood's *Survival* to the tradition of Canadian postcolonialism, reading it as another example of the many colonial and postcolonial articulations of 'the unhomeliness of the Canadian locale'. While she gives no definition of the term 'unhomeliness', Homi K. Bhabha writes about the concept in his 1992 essay 'The world and the home', and continues the discussion in his 1994 study *The Locations of Culture*, stating that it is 'the paradigmatic colonial and

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[2] While I am aware that in contemporary postcolonial discourse terms such as 'settler-invader' or even 'invader-settler' are generally preferred because they emphasize the fact that the process of settling was also a process of colonization, I will be using the short form 'settler' in order to avoid unnecessarily lengthening the present text.

[3] When discussing Canadian literature and literary tradition, the present study only refers to Canadian literature written in English. The English-Canadian and French-Canadian traditions are generally considered to be distinct (see Hammill 2007: 4), and the latter is not under discussion here.

postcolonial condition' (Bhabha 1994: 9), although it can also be found in other kinds literature that engages in questions of cultural difference. Bhabha derives the concept of 'the unhomely' from Freud's *unheimlich*, and in keeping with Freud's original idea of *unheimlich* as something repressed which resurfaces – thus disturbing the subject – Bhabha sees 'the unhomely' as something eerie that manifests in the familiar, transgressing the traditional, yet arbitrary, social boundaries of home and the world, the private and the public. Thus the unhomely moment occurs in literature when something repressed or forgotten is embedded in the story, reminding the reader of a horrifying past or the historical displacement in the characters' lives. What is repressed in colonial and postcolonial fictions, and what recurs, thus causing the emergence of the unhomely moments, is often the violent history of colonialism and its consequences. Unhomeliness therefore creates an interstitial reality or reveals the existence of hybridity by relocating and blurring the spatial and psychic boundaries of the personal and the political. (Bhabha 1992, 1994: 9-13; Freud 2001: 166.) [4]

While many Canadian theorists have focused on the hybridity of the Canadian subject or identity, especially in the case of diasporic and immigrant writing,[5] they have rarely discussed the unhomely moments in these fictions. What I want to argue is that the feelings of non-belonging and in-betweenness, and thus the unhomely conditions depicted in Canadian literature, are related to the legacy of colonialism in Canadian culture and society. My aim is to show that contemporary Canadian women novelists from various origins frequently relate those postcolonial conditions to the unhomeliness of the Canadian locale while reflecting the tradition Atwood identified in *Survival*, but also rewriting and renegotiating the past and Canada as a home. Moreover, what Bhabha's theory of unhomeliness and Atwood's *Survival* have in common is their

[4] My decision to use the English terms *unhomely* and *unhomeliness*, instead of the German *Unheimlich* and *Unheimlichkeit*, is based on the fact that Bhabha (1992, 1994) employs the English translations in the essays which I discuss and which my analysis follows. As will become clear in chapter three of the present thesis, theorists like Sugars (2004a) and New (1997) have followed Bhabha's usage in their studies on Canadian literature and postcolonial theory.

[5] See, for example, Sugars' 2004 anthology of Canadian postcolonial criticism, *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, especially sections VI and VII; and the collection of papers from the "Is Canada Postcolonial?' Conference held in 2000 at the University of Manitoba, edited by Laura Moss and published in 2003 with the title *Is Canada Postcolonial?: Unsettling Canadian Literature*.

strong focus on 'home', a notion which is highly relevant in postcolonial discourse (Macfarlane 2003: 223–224), but in Canada has so far been mainly discussed in relation to immigrant fiction, be it in the case of early settlers or contemporary diasporic communities (c.f. Macfarlane 2003: 223–224; Howells 2004: 209–210; Gunew 2008). However, I propose in the present study that the notion of home is also central to contemporary Canadian women authors writing from other than immigrant positions.

In this study, then, I will analyse two coming-of-age novels aimed for adult readership by contemporary Canadian female novelists: Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000), and Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness* (2004), both survival stories of the new millennium with adolescent protagonists. Both novels look at Canada from a minority perspective; *Monkey Beach* through the personal history of the Indigenous[6] protagonist Lisamarie Hill, and *A Complicated Kindness* from the point of view of the 16-year-old first-person narrator Nomi Nickel. However, both novels are also linked to the Canadian tradition of women's writing through intertextual elements that relate Robinson's narrative to Atwood's 1972 novel *Surfacing*, and Toews's story to Alice Munro's 1971 novel *The Lives of Girls and Women*, while also utilizing many of the cultural motifs described in *Survival* in the narration. Furthermore, whether the setting is the rural reservation and the rainforests of British Columbia in Robinson's *Monkey Beach*, or the small Manitoban Mennonite town of Toews's novel, unhomeliness can be found as an element of narrative, problematizing notions of home and belonging.

Monkey Beach,[7] published in 2000, is the Haisla-Heiltsuk writer Eden Robinson's debut novel, which was met with critical acclaim and was nominated for several literary awards, including Canada's two most prestigious awards, the Governor General's Literary Award (GGLA) and the Scotiabank Giller Prize, as well as the Ethel Wilson

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[6] The term 'Indian' used by Atwood (1972) and her contemporaries is today considered a European misconception, and the Indigenous peoples of Canada have sought to reclaim the power of definition by renaming themselves as, among others, 'Indigenous', 'Native', 'Aboriginal' and 'First Nations' (New 1997: 27). I have chosen to use the term 'Indigenous' following the Indigenous theorist Marie Battiste, as the term includes all the different Indigenous populations of Canada, although I am aware that all of the more recent terms seem to be matters of dispute even among Indigenous theorists (see Hammill 2007: 18–19; Moss 2003: 10, and Van Toorn 2004: 45n1).

[7] Subsequent references are to the Abacus 2001 edition. The novel will be abbreviated MB.

Fiction Prize which the novel won. The novel differs considerably from the author's other works, her previous short-story collection *Traplines* (1996) as well as her second novel *Blood Sports* (2006), which both focus on urban Canada and mainly feature non-Indigenous characters. *Traplines*, which received international recognition and was Robinson's thesis for her Master of Arts in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia, and *Blood Sports*, which subsequently grew out of a story entitled 'Contact Sports' in *Traplines*, are on the surface level about the dysfunctional lives of drug addicts, psychopaths and sociopaths living in the notorious East Vancouver neighbourhood. *Monkey Beach*, on the other hand, is set on a remote wilderness location, the Kitamaat reserve on the coast of British Columbia, where Robinson herself was born in 1968 and for the main part raised, apart from the short periods of her childhood when her family lived in her Heiltsuk mother's hometown Bella Bella. Unlike Robinson's other books, apart from a story in *Traplines* called 'Queen of the North' which in fact served as a starting point for *Monkey Beach*, her debut novel deals with Indigenous issues and focuses solely on Indigenous characters through the viewpoint of the adolescent narrator, Haisla girl Lisamarie Hill. (Methot 2000; Jensen 2006; Dobson 2009: 59–60; The Canadian Encyclopedia 2010.)

Robinson's novel is a mix between a wilderness quest and *bildungsroman* narrated by Lisamarie, a troubled teenager who sets out to the sea in order to find her brother Jimmy, who has joined the fishing crew of Uncle Josh's boat *The Queen of the North*, and has gone missing at sea. (MB: 2–3, 5–6.) What begins as a search for a missing family member turns into a journey into the self as well as a vision quest, as Lisamarie reminisces her childhood and her adolescence, depicting her own alienation while negotiating between the traditional Haisla culture and the modern lifestyle adopted by her parents' generation. On her boat trip from home in Kitamaat to Monkey Beach, where she dangerously unites with her spirit guardians in a near-death experience, Lisamarie recounts how she gradually became acquainted with Haisla traditions as she took part in fishing trips, the gathering of plants and the preparation of food. She has also been drawn to find out about Haisla mythology because of her emerging shamanistic abilities which she cannot control, especially her continuing sightings of a shape-shifting little man, whose appearance always predicts death: that of her Uncle

Mick, her Ma-ma-oo, and perhaps also Jimmy. (E.g. MB: 73–80, 112–114, 131–134, 148–154, 289–293.) As the story unfolds, LisaMarie discovers family secrets, finally also revealing the reason for Jimmy's sudden interest in learning the fishing trade as she discovers that Jimmy had learned of the sexual abuse of his girlfriend Karaoke by Uncle Josh (MB: 122, 254, 361–365).

Like many contemporary Canadian Indigenous writers who emphasize the importance of the continuation of oral traditions in their works, Robinson holds the story-telling traditions of her community in high regard (Jensen 2006; VanToorn 2004: 24). *Monkey Beach* juxtaposes Haisla traditions and oral stories with modern realism, as, in addition to the little man predicting death, LisaMarie encounters trickster ravens, spirit guides, 'sasquatches' as well as other uncanny creatures (e.g. MB: 15–16, 153, 259–262, 316, 367–374). These elements, perceived as supernatural in the light of European traditions, have led critics to discuss the novel as a Gothic text – a reading which, as Jodey Castricano (2006: 806) argues, the novel both affirms and resists at the same time. While there certainly are elements of Gothic in the novel – in addition to the above-mentioned supernatural creatures, the novel deals with untold secrets and unspeakable crimes such as sexual abuse and adultery, which return to haunt the characters – reading these instances simply in light of the Western tradition of Gothic would result in disregarding their implications in an Indigenous context (see Leggatt 2003, Castricano 2006), and my intention is to read Robinson's text in light of works by Indigenous theorists as well.

In her novel *A Complicated Kindness* (2004),[8] Miriam Toews (born 1964) also looks at Canada from the point of view of a small, marginalized community – the locale of the novel is the fictional rural town East Village, an isolated and silent Mennonite town in Manitoba, where excommunication or shunning of those church members whose behaviour is no longer in accordance with the strict rules of the congregation is everyday reality. Like *Monkey Beach*, Toews's novel also features a teenage first-person narrator, a Mennonite girl called Nomi Nickel, who is filled with angst and grief,

[8] Subsequent references are to the 2004 Faber and Faber edition. The novel will be abbreviated as CK.

and is on the brink of denouncing her religion after her older sister has left town and her mother has gone missing. The novel depicts the in-between existence of both Nomi Nickel and the oppressive, fundamentalist culture of her Mennonite community, which Nomi too dreams of fleeing. In spite of her wish to relocate anywhere else – but preferably New York – she stays, explicitly because of her father whose sense of helplessness in the face of their family's situation culminates in his strange decision to start selling the family's furniture, but also because she is not quite ready to give up on her faith yet. (CK: 1–6.) While Nomi tries to solve the puzzle of her mother's disappearance, and her narration of her life story unfolds with multiple flashbacks, the reader is faced with a sense of an unknown presence embedded in the narrative: it is as if Nomi has a specific narratee, someone she is telling the story to, someone who she is familiar with. The dénouement reveals this presence to be Mr. Quiring, Nomi's English teacher, to whom Nomi is writing the written assignment referred to in the beginning of the book, a story with an 'ending that is quite out of the writer's control'. Mr. Quiring, it turns out, is also the one who has provided Nomi's family with an ending quite out of Nomi's control. (CK: 1, 4–6, 234.)

Frequent biblical references and allusions help to create the oppressive atmosphere of patriarchal fundamentalism which Nomi associates with her hometown. In a personal interview with Di Brandt, Miriam Toews, who herself was brought up in a small Manitoban Mennonite town called Steinbach, explains that the biblical quotes and allusions, while a framework that the narrator Nomi is obviously familiar with, also function as Toews's way of showing that there are several interpretations of Christianity and the Bible, not only the fundamentalist one which Nomi rejects in the novel (Brandt 2005: 44–45). In fact, the author maintains that the novel is 'a critique, essentially, of fundamentalism, and that particular culture of control and punishment' (quoted in Brandt 2005: 20) with which Toews also became familiar in her childhood and adolescence since, although her parents were well-educated and quite liberal, her family belonged to a very conservative congregation (Weich 2004). Toews left her hometown Steinbach at the age of 18, and after living and travelling in Montreal, Halifax and Europe, returned to Manitoba to complete a BA degree in Film Studies at the University

of Manitoba in Winnipeg, in addition to the Bachelor of Journalism degree she holds from the University of Kings College in Halifax (Grandy 2010).

Her first novel, *The Summer of My Amazing Luck* (1996), is a story about a teenage single mother on welfare who has recently lost her own mother, and her second, *A Boy of Good Breeding* (1998) continues the theme of absent parents while depicting small-town life in Southern Manitoba. The award-winning novels were followed by a memoir of Toews's father who, after suffering from bipolar disease for most of his adult life, committed suicide at the age of 62. Entitled *Swing Low: A Life* and published in 2000, the book is usually categorized as non-fiction, though Toews adopts her father's voice rather than that of a biographer's. However, it was *A Complicated Kindness*, Toews's third novel and the first one about Mennonites, which made the author famous, as the novel was shortlisted for both the Giller Prize and the GGLA in 2004, the latter of which it won. The novel has certain features in common with Toews's other works of fiction: the theme of absent family members and a narrative voice that is a combination of comical naivety and deeply felt despair, thus balancing on the line of comedy and tragedy like all of Toews's novels. Her fourth novel, *The Flying Troutmans*, a road story featuring two children and their aunt driving around the United States looking for the children's father after their mother has been diagnosed with a mental illness, was published in 2008, while the fifth, entitled *Irma Voth* and published in 2011, returns to the subject of Mennonites by portraying a Mennonite community living in a rural Mexican village from the point of view of a young female character. (Barber 2011; Bergman 2004; Weich 2004; Weiler 2008; Grandy 2010.)

Monkey Beach and *A Complicated Kindness* share certain features, such as their open endings; the protagonists are left in an in-between state, with LisaMarie lying on Monkey Beach, having ventured into the spirit world in an attempt to find out what happened to her brother, and is now somewhere between the land of the living and the dead (MB: 374) and Nomi, after her excommunication and her father's disappearance, is on the verge of leaving East Village but is not sure about it just yet (CK: 246). The endings suggest the 'survival, but not victory' theme that Atwood (1972: 32–33) proposes is the key pattern in Canadian fiction, and both novelists in fact state that they

have intentionally left the fate of the narrators to the readers' imagination (Toews quoted in Brandt 2004: 21, Robinson quoted in Jensen 2006). In addition to similarities in their endings, their remote rural settings, and narrators who are rebelling and alienated teenagers as well as narrative structures that play with multiple flashbacks, both novels are situated at the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, the time of their authors' youth. In my analysis, however, I will treat the novels separately, comparing them to their 1970s intertexts by Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro rather than to each other. Before conducting the analysis of the two novels, I will discuss *Survival* and its relation to contemporary Canadian postcolonial research in chapter two. Chapter three focuses on the concept of unhomeliness and Canadian women's writing, concentrating on how the unhomely emerges in the women's writing studied by Atwood and on how the notion of 'home' is negotiated by Bhabha and Atwood and generally in the Canadian context. Chapters four and five are then devoted to the analysis of *Monkey Beach* and *A Complicated Kindness*, respectively. The following chapter begins with a short introduction to *Survival* as well as its reception in Canada, and continues with analyzing Atwood's themes in relation to later postcolonial issues and theories.

2. *SURVIVAL* AND CANADIAN POSTCOLONIALISM(S)

In *Survival*, Atwood (1972: 134) notes that because 'Canadian history is very short,' when Canadians look for their roots, they probably come up with the 'semi-mythic figures' of explorers or European settlers who for Canadians represent the 'late middle-ages' of the nation (Atwood 1972: 134). By lamenting the shortness of Canadian history Atwood refers to the era of European colonialism, beginning with the arrival of English and French explorers in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and the subsequent establishment of colonies, Newfoundland being the first British colony in the present-day Canada and New France consisting of the North American regions conquered by the French (Hammill 2007: xi–xii, 197). In this version of Canada's history as a white settler colony, the process of settling the New World was followed by several intercolonial wars between the two "founding nations" over their North American territories, which came to their conclusion in 1763 when France ceded its remaining colonies to Britain by signing the Treaty of Paris. The British presence in Canada was then strengthened as around 40,000 United Empire Loyalists immigrated during the American Revolution in 1776-1783, and as the late 18th and the 19th century saw the arrival of immigrants especially from Scotland, England and Ireland. As the various groups of settlers living in Canada shared anti-American sentiments and the colony's bond with Britain, the centre of the Empire, was strong, Canada gained self-rule with the title of Dominion in the 1867 Confederation. (Hammill 2007: xii–xvi, 7–8.)

However, while the history of Canada may be short in terms of European settlement, according to archaeological evidence its human history dates back to 11,000 BC, with permanent settlements and villages established on the northwest coast, where Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* is located, as early as 9,000 BC (Ames and Suttles 1997: 255; Hammill 2007: xi). The notion of Canadian history as simply that of a white settler nation, which Atwood alludes to when speaking of shortness, is today highly critiqued precisely because of its disavowal of the Indigenous populations of Canada, of whom around 93 per cent were killed by the imported diseases which the explorers had brought with them since 16th century, and whose characterization as primitive and/or

savage allowed for assimilations policies that continue to affect their lives even today (Henderson 2000c; Van Toorn 2004: 24; Hammill 2007: 19–20). Nevertheless, Atwood's (1972: 134) claim of the shortness of Canadian history is certainly accurate in the case of the history of Canadian writing, which began with the explorers' first accounts of the New World in the 16th century, as the Indigenous cultures were oral in nature. While much of the earliest Canadian literature was written by European settlers for audiences 'back home' after the Confederation in 1867 authors began to concentrate more specifically on Canadian content. (Dvorak 2004: 155–156; Hammill 2007: 6–9.)

When Canada became independent in 1947, the desire to distance the nation from the cultural domination of the metropolis strengthened, and in the case of literature showing the existence of a viable national tradition played an important part in the construction of the Canadian canon, as in other settler colonies such as Australia and New Zealand (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 133; Hammill 2007: 10–11). This resulted in a phase of intense cultural nationalism in the late 1960s and the 1970s, following the publication of the Massey Commission's report on the state of arts and culture in Canada in 1951, the anti-colonial and anti-imperial sentiments expressed by the Canadian philosopher George Grant in *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965) and *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (1969), as well as Northrop Frye's influential 'Conclusion' to the *Literary History of Canada* in 1965. All of these shared and encouraged the idea of nation and a national imaginary as a conscious construction, and literary critics and writers began to produce critical texts ranging from thematic studies, which attempted to show that there indeed was unity in the Canadian literary tradition, to texts that focused more explicitly on the colonial condition of the nation.[9] (Brown 2001; Redekop 2004: 265–266, 274; Sugars 2004a: xvi–xvii; Hammill 2007: xx, 8, 10–11.)

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[9] In addition to *Survival*, D.G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (1970), Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden* (1971), and John Moss's *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction* (1974), among others, are today considered thematic criticism, while Dennis Lee's 'Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space' (1973), Robert Kroetsch's 'Unhiding the Hidden' (1974) and Robin Mathews's 'Literature and Colonialism' (1978), to name a few, focus explicitly on the problems of cultural production and the colonial condition. (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 133–134; Brown 2001; Sugars 2004a: xvi–xvii.)

Margaret Atwood's *Survival* was one of the studies that set out to prove that there indeed was a characteristically Canadian literary tradition, which was separate from the literatures of the former mother countries as well as from that of the United States (Atwood 1972: 11, 13–14). Atwood (1972: 15–19, 35–36, 79–80, 181–185, 237) argues that Canadians had so far been unable to define themselves as a nation because of their colonial victim mentality – in other words their tendency to regard Canada culturally as nothing more than an inferior extension of the British Empire or her powerful southern neighbour, the United States. Therefore she (1972: 13–19) proposes to provide a roadmap into the nation's psyche through a reading of the country's literature, hence showing that culturally Canada is independent. Beginning with Northrop Frye's suggestion that for Canadians the lack of a sense of identity is epitomized in the question 'Where is here?', Atwood (1972: 17–19) maintains that the problem of Canada as 'an unknown territory' is also a product of the difficulty of finding a meaningful connection between self and place in the settler colony. Incapable of feeling at home in their physical and social environment, colonial Canadians produce literature that centres on victimization and is filled with narratives where the ultimate goal is survival – not victory, but avoiding defeat (Atwood 1972: 32–35, 39).

In fact, the theme of survival – be it 'bare', as in stories about staying alive and not going crazy in the bush; 'grim', as in stories of disasters or crises; 'cultural', as in the case of French Canadians; or 'spiritual', maintaining your will to live – permeates all Canadian writing up to the early 1970s to such an extent, Atwood (1972: 32–34) insists, that it could be defined as the 'unifying symbol' of the nation's literature, its characteristically Canadian twist. The notion of survival is abundantly present in the fiction Atwood studies, as are the obstacles to it, mainly the Canadian tendency to see oneself as a victim and, more often than not, displacing the cause of victimization onto something other than the real culprit (Atwood 1972: 32–35, 39, 41, 79). Her thematic analysis aims at studying the different manifestations of the survival and victimization themes in prose, poetry and plays, and Atwood (1972: 13) proposes to approach Canadian fiction through looking at its 'key patterns'; in other words, storylines and motifs that she finds typical of Canadian literature. This approach can be roughly divided into two perspectives on Canada: the historical and the modern. According to

Atwood (1972: 112–114), being unaware of both their cultural heritage and their current place in the world has led Canadian writers to search for cultural identity and ideas of Canadianness from the historical representations of the country: ‘There is a distinct archaeological motif in Canadian literature – unearthing the buried and forgotten past,’ Atwood (1972: 112) states, naming exploration as one of the most persistent motifs in Canadian writing (1972: 114). The first part of her analysis deals with first encounters: stories by and about the settlers and explorers who came to Canada from Europe, with narratives that describe what they were faced with and how they perceived the country.

These figures, Atwood (1972: 49–54, 115, 122–123) maintains, are usually seen as the victims of monstrous wilderness, unable to find their way – or sometimes, find anything at all, because the land as it is seems empty of all meaning – and manage in the difficult conditions of the Canadian bush. The narratives portray Canada as an unwelcoming wilderness, where the settlers and explorers fall victims to ‘nature the monster’, facing death, hardship and inability to coexist with the unresponsive natural elements while trying to build a new society (Atwood 1972: 49, 54–55, 114–115, 120–123). However, Atwood (1972: 34–36, 41, 49–53, 62–63, 120–122) rightfully notes that this view of the country is a result of several misconceptions: firstly, the difference between the European idea of ‘the New World’ and the actual reality of the Canadian wilderness was considerable; secondly, the settlers’ anthropocentric and Eurocentric view of nature refused the creation of new societies with their fortresses, churches and houses according to anything but the already acquired beliefs of a correct, ‘divine’ order; thirdly, describing the Canadian landscape, vastly different from the European, with the imported language proved a difficult task; and, most importantly, Canadians tend to see themselves as victims to the extent that their sense of victimization seems like a conscious wish. The former three are, in fact, issues that connect Atwood's text to later theoretical discussion on settler writing and culture, making it relevant to contemporary post-colonial discussions dealing with Canada, as I will argue in the following section.

The second part of *Survival*, dealing with modern society, has less to do with settler postcolonialism. Discussing issues like immigration, gender, being an artist in a colonial society, and questions of identity at large, Atwood outlines patterns she finds typical of

20th century Canadian fiction. According to her (1972: 131), one of the most common ways of looking at the Canada that came into existence after colonization is the three-generational family novel. These portray family as an element that suppresses personal growth and the development of a subject's identity, with the first generation transmitting their old-fashioned values onto their children and grandchildren (Atwood 1972: 131–132, 134-136). While the novels focus on the need to escape and the inability to do so, they are often also about loyalty and survival (Atwood 1972: 140–141), as the novels I study in this thesis also imply. This same pattern is also visible in stories by and about 20th century immigrants, who are faced not with the harsh land but an unwelcoming urban society (Atwood 1972: 149). Immigrant writing is also concerned with the problematic nature of Canadian multiculturalism – namely, the refusal of *a* Canadian identity which an immigrant could try to adapt to, but also the impossibility of maintaining one's cultural identity intact without remaining to some extent an outsider in Canadian society (Atwood 1972: 149–151, 155–156). The same issue has since been raised by numerous Canadian cultural and literary theorists discussing multiculturalism and the cultural hybridity of contemporary Canada especially from the 1990s onwards, and in this respect Atwood's analysis of the immigrant condition is highly topical today.

Despite Atwood's rather pessimistic and polemical analysis of Canadian culture and literature, the initial reactions of both literary critics and the reading public were enthusiastic: shortly after its publication, Canadians bought *Survival* in great numbers, making it the best-selling book of literary criticism in Canada. However, while feminists readily accepted the victimization theme, thematic criticism, including *Survival*, soon began to be criticised in the literary circles, as critics[10] argued that Canadian literature was too heterogeneous to be reduced to formulae representing collective identity. In its essentializing proposition of a unique Canadian identity the study was clearly a product of its time, and therefore dated quickly. (Hunter 1996: 18, 20, 26, 33-40; Brown 2001; Hammill 2007: 61-62.) The author herself seems to agree,

[10] The most vocal critics of thematic criticism were Frank Davey in 'Surviving the Paraphrase' (1976) as well as Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon in their 1977 essay 'Mandatory subversive manifesto: Canadian criticism vs. literary criticism' (see Brown 2001 for discussion).

maintaining in her introduction to the 2004 edition of *Survival* that the objective of the study was informed by the realization that the general reading public knew very little of a Canadian literary tradition, if they were aware of it at all, and that because there was by then no doubt about the matter, there would be no need for a study like *Survival* in 2004 (Atwood 2004: 6–7, 11). Yet she (2004: 10) noted that, although the face of Canadian literature and criticism had since changed, questions about nation and identity still intrigued Canadians, which made the study relevant in contemporary culture, a position held by several contemporary Canadian literary critics, such as Russell Morton Brown (2001), Magdalene Redekop (2004), and Laura Moss (2009).

Brown (2001) and Redekop (2004) suggest that despite the multicultural plurality of contemporary Canadian writing, cultural themes and codes exist in Canadian literature as writers, both consciously and unconsciously, engage in a dialogue with the country's literary tradition in their works. Brown (2001) argues that since the thematic studies have, despite criticism, become canonical texts in Canada, a reconsideration of their value as both a record and a source of cultural codes and typically Canadian literary themes might prompt new readings of the texts and Canadian writing. Redekop (2004: 263), on the other hand, sees Canadian writing as 'a conversation in progress,' a view also articulated by Atwood (1972: 244) in the final chapter of *Survival*, where she encourages Canadian writers to 'control [their] own space' while engaging in a dialogue with the literary tradition of the nation:

> If you're a writer, you need not discard the tradition, nor do you have to succumb to it. […] Instead, you can explore the tradition – which is not the same as merely reflecting it – and in the course of the exploration you may find some new ways of writing. (Atwood 1972: 238.)

Thus, after identifying a tradition rooted in victimization, Atwood urges Canadian writers to shed their colonial mentality and heritage while engaging in a dialogue with the established literary tradition, which is exactly what the authors studied in my thesis have done in a move that implies the kind of resistance to imperialism that is associated with postcolonial theory.

In fact, in Canada the issue of national culture and literature is linked to discussions of postcolonialism, as both Brown (2001) and Redekop (2004) note. Redekop (2004: 267) states that, '[l]ike other settler colonies, Canada is bound to experience resistance to efforts to construct a group identity based on linguistic, racial, or religious homogeneity. […] [T]he postcolonial emphasis on cultures as hybridized captures the dilemma.' In other words, questions of nationalism, culture and identity in Canada are tied to the multicultural fusion of co-existing cultures and group identities, whose shared view of the importance of culture and art to the nation Moss (2009: 9) refers to as 'oscillating circles of nationalism – nations within nations and nations overlapping with nations in the same space.' The difficulty of discussing cultural nationalism in the context of and in relation to postcolonial studies has meant that, while *Survival* is usually figured into the field of Canadian postcolonial theory as a form of literary resistance, it is also seen as engaging in a search for something that is now perceived to be an imaginary construct – namely, a singular national identity – by literary theorists who argue for cultural hybridity, and has therefore seldom gained attention as anything but a part of the cultural nationalist project of 'writing back' in postcolonial research. (Moss 2003: 3, 7; Sturgess 2003: 12–13; Bennett 2004: 125–126; Sugars 2004a: xiii, xvi.)

However, postcolonial theorists too have suggested a return to works of thematic criticism in a contemporary context. While recognizing that the rhetoric of the 1970s cultural nationalism was based on the settlers' displacement of Indigenous populations as the victims of colonization and imperialism, the postcolonial discourse theorist Alan Lawson (1995) states in his article 'Postcolonial theory and the "settler" subject' that the studies conducted during the phase of thematic criticism should not be disclosed from the discussion of Canadian postcolonialism as they offer an insight into how 'the colonial moment [returns to] the coded languages of a culture' (Lawson 2004: 160–161) – in other words, how the European settlers' view of the settling process has affected the cultural tropes and themes at work in Canadian writing. More recently, in her introduction to *Is Canada Postcolonial?: Unsettling Canadian Literature*, Moss (2003: 7) proposes that one possibly valuable way of reading Canadian literature postcolonially might be to read it through the thematic studies of the 1970s while at the same time reopening Canadian texts to multiple versions of history and Canadian identities. Yet to

speak of the postcolonial in relation to Canadian literature, and especially *Survival* with its strong focus on the settler experience and Anglo-Canadian writing, is not simple: defining postcolonialism in the Canadian context is virtually impossible due to the plurality of voices to be heard in the discussion and the difficulty of defining the postcolonial *per se* (Moss 2003: 12–15; Sugars 2004a: xiii–xiv). Therefore the following sections investigate *Survival*'s relevance to Canadian postcolonial literary theory, with section 2.1 discussing the study's relation to settler postcolonialism and section 2.2 addressing the issue of *Survival*'s problematic Anglo-centrism with respect to the multi-ethnic composition of contemporary Canadian society and contemporary postcolonial views of culture as hybridized. Finally, section 2.3 investigates *Survival*'s representation of the Indigenous peoples of Canada and contemporary Indigenous issues as well as proposing a definition of postcolonialism that acknowledges the multicultural diversity of Canadian society of today.

2.1 Settler postcolonialism and images of Canada

In their seminal work of postcolonial theory entitled *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin base their analysis of the colonial and postcolonial on the idea that all nations and cultures that were formerly under British rule be accepted into the discipline of postcolonialism. Their (1989: 2) view of the field rests on the notion of resistance to imperialism, as they see postcolonial literatures as ones that 'emerged […] out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves […] by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre;' a definition which seems to describe the intention of *Survival* up to a point. However, one of the main issues in Canadian postcolonialism has been the difficulty of defining whose voice should be considered postcolonial in the country, a point of debate further complicated by the fact that settler cultures are often placed in opposition to "real" colonized nations such as India and the former African colonies in postcolonial discourse (Kroeker 2003: 239; Moss 2003: 2–3, 7–8; Brydon 2004: 166). In response to arguments dismissing the settler subject from the field, several Canadian critics, most notably Diana Brydon, Alan

Lawson and Stephen Slemon, while remaining aware of the settlers' complicity in the effacement of the Indigenous populations, have argued for the importance of the settler's inclusion in postcolonial literary studies (Brydon 2004: 172).

Stephen Slemon maintained in his influential 1990 article 'Unsettling the Empire: Resistance theory for the Second World' that the task of the postcolonial critic is to locate and analyze literary resistances to colonialism '*wherever* they lie' (Slemon 2004: 141). In other words, he (2004: 142–143, 147–148) proposed that the settler experience of colonialism was valuable because of its particularity: as the settlers were located in-between the imperial binaries, such as colonizer/colonized, home/away and Europe/Others, Slemon (2004: 143, 148) argued, 'the illusion of a stable self/other, here/there binary division has never been available to [Anglo-Canadian] writers.'[11] This resulted in the internalization of the object of resistance; in other words, resistance to colonialism and imperialism was not directed simply towards an object *outside* the self, but also inward, *at* the self, which results in 'internal conflict' in settler writing (Slemon 2004: 148). This internal conflict is also visible in the texts Atwood (1972: 37–38, 40–41, 62, 92) discusses in *Survival*, as in the Canadian tendency to displace the causes of victimization onto objects outside their control, like history or fate, and in the stories that show a desire for victimization and where the characters seem to possess a will to be a victim. In my analysis, this dilemma comes to be seen from the perspective of peoples colonized and marginalized by the dominant Anglo-Canadian society, but, even though the point of view is different, the same tendencies to perceive one's situation as a victim emerge.

Atwood (1972: 170) remarks that the problem is that 'Canadians don't know which side they're on,' since undermining authorities becomes difficult in the position where one both *is* the establishment but also *outside* it. This is also how Lawson (2004: 154–145)

[11] This view of the settlers' liminality rests partly on the notion that, while they were complicit in the process of colonization, the settler's actions were governed by the imperial centre. The Indigenous theorist James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson (2000c) disagrees, stating that it was in fact the immigrants who chose to break the treaties governing land rights originally made by the Indigenous populations and the British Empire. Henderson's work will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.3.

sees the position of the settler who is forced into the mimicry of authority in two respects: firstly, while the settler represents the authority of the Empire, their authority is projected through the mimicry of the Empire from which the settler is separated. Secondly, although the settler exercises authority over the Indigene and the land on behalf of the Empire, he or she is always desirous of an authentic connection to the land, which translates into mimicry of the Indigene (Lawson 2004: 154–157). While the mimicry of the Empire shows in Atwood's (1972: 120–124) account of the settlers' attempt to make the wilderness a home through re-creating Europe by building imitations of their previous environments, as the Mennonite community portrayed in Toews's novel have done, there are more examples of the desire for Indigenous authority in *Survival*. Lawson (2004: 155–157) argues that the settlers' dream of Indigenous authenticity led to and also enabled the effacement of the Indigenous populations in the settler colonies: for the land to be settled, it had to be empty, and the Indigenous populations were repeatedly portrayed as a 'dying race,' whereby the settler could replace 'the disappearing Indigene' (Lawson 2004: 155–157). Commenting on the Indian [sic] as victim in Canadian writing, Atwood (1972: 95–96) notes the tendency to describe the Indigenous populations as 'wiped out by disease,' or 'a vanishing race,' which according to Lawson (2004: 156–157) is typical of imperial discourse.

However, as the land is not empty, the process of settling in fact turns into an invasion, and Atwood (1972: 96) points out that some Anglo-Canadian writing recognizes that the 'vanishing race' was in fact destroyed by an other who aimed to displace the Indigenous populations culturally, a point which Eden Robinson also repeatedly makes in her Haisla account of 'the vanishing race'. These stories portray the Indigenous peoples as 'extinct civilizations' with art and other relics left behind (Atwood 1972: 96, 99). Lawson (2004: 157) maintains that the existence of 'a recoverable, authentic Indigenous culture' allows the settlers to act as if the invasion never happened; thus the settler, desiring Indigenous authority, turns to the ancient Indigenous cultures 'to inherit the Natives' spiritual "rites" to the land' (Lawson 2004: 157) – in other words, to achieve Indigenous authenticity, the settler mimics the Indigene, who is now considered a spiritual ancestor. Similarly, Atwood (1972: 52–54, 78, 102–104) observes that some Canadian fiction considers the Indigenous peoples to be the only ones with an authentic

connection to the land and therefore the true ancestors of Canadians, and their legends and mythology as a way in which the settlers could re-connect with nature. Atwood (1972: 104–105) claims that for Anglo-Canadians, identifying with the Indigenous populations is an attempt to figure out their 'here', and hence experience a sense of belonging in colonial space. As both Atwood (1972: 91, 105) and Lawson (2004: 157) point out, the desire for authenticity can lead to *mimicry*, but the settler can never replace the Indigene, and displacing the Indigenous populations leaves the settler in an ambivalent position in the Empire/Indigene binary.

A more extensive account of the different imperial literary tropes and linguistic codes at work in Canadian writing is offered by the cultural and literary critic W.H. New, whose analysis of codes describing the Canadian land in *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence and Power in Canadian Writing* bear resemblance to Atwood's findings. New (1997: 12–16) argues that imperial discourse affected the experience of the settlers and the literary representations of Canadian land.[12] What is evident in many explorer and settler stories is the 'association between development, morality and land,' with wild land seen as animal, uncultivated, uncivilized, unfinished, and something that the civilized observer should avoid identifying with, while civilized land was considered as utilized and settled, resembling the norm of the green English garden (New 1997: 15). These codes help explain Atwood's observations about the Canadian literary tropes describing the wilderness: if the received assumption of the European immigrants was that the uncultivated wilderness was hellish, chaotic, savage, and not to be identified with (New 1997: 22), its representation as either monstrous and hostile or 'unreal' (Atwood 1972: 49) is understandable. However, representations of Canadian land are also connected to imperial politics more explicitly, as land was also considered property to be acquired and owned, and the language of land was also affected by notions of ownership (New 1997: 73–74). As Atwood (1972: 120, 122–123) remarks, controlling the wilderness by cultivating it was usually considered the task of the 'Western European Man,' who attempted to create order in nature, which in turn was often

[12] My usage of the term 'Canadian land' follows both Atwood (1972) and New (1997), who use the term to refer both to the Canadian wilderness and to the areas that today make up the territory of the nation.

equated with the figure of woman and femininity. The wilderness began to be seen as a white male territory, and the process of exploring and clearing it as a project identified with romantic male heroism. Colonial space hence became a question of both gender and race. (New 1997: 79–80, 87, 109–110.) Contemporary Canadian writers, especially from groups perceived as marginal in the society, like women, Indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities, have increasingly begun to challenge these dominant wilderness images in their writing (see New 1997: 152; Sturgess 2003: 20; Hammill 2007: 92), and Robinson's wilderness quest is no exception in this regard.

Both New (1997: 66, 70–71) and Atwood (1972: 49–51) attribute the tropes and codes used in describing the Canadian land to tension between the European settlers' learned expectations about nature and the actual reality of the wilderness. New (1997: 71) maintains that the settlers, trying to engage with the land, were distanced from it by the language they used. 'The conventional English-language vocabulary was resistant,' New (1997: 71) states, and notes that there were no suitable words for describing the wilderness which the imperial discourse affecting the settlers' perception 'had predesigned as barren and uninhabitable'. Atwood makes a similar observation:

> In a lot of early Canadian poetry you find this desire to *name* struggling against a terminology which is foreign and completely inadequate to describe what is actually being seen. […] 'Nature is dead' can mean 'Things don't look the way they are supposed to, that is, the way they did "at home." Therefore I am in exile.' (Atwood 1972: 62.)

The above quotation makes visible the internal conflict caused by linguistic alienation, which Ashcroft et al. (1989: 135–137, 140–141) find typical of settler writing: because of the difference between the European system of representation and the new environment, the settlers are confronted with a crisis of identity as there is no means of describing their otherness in colonial space with the language of imperialism. While they (1989) do not speak of a simple mismatch of vocabulary Robinson's frequent use of Haisla words when speaking of, for example, plants growing in the forests of British Columbia, seems to be a comment on the insufficiency of the English language.

Thus, although constructing an image of Canada based on imperial tropes, *Survival* reflects many features that according to Ashcroft et al. (1989: 135–136) characterize settler writing: the inauthentic connection to the land, the desire to construct an Indigenous past, as well as the assertion of difference from the Empire. The study also engages in questions of place and displacement, problematizing imperial binaries such as here/there, home/away, while concentrating on the crisis of identity caused by displacement and dislocation – themes that postcolonial writing in general is concerned with (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 9–11). However, as Moss (2003: 11–12) notes, discussing the Canadian postcolonial only in the framework of settler culture and Canada as primarily an settler colony is an insufficient and limiting approach, as it overlooks the experiences of the colonized Indigenous populations and leaves the demographic diversity of Canadian society and literature outside the discussion. While I consider the settler perspective to be an important starting point for understanding contemporary Canadian writing, as the literary tropes and themes that Atwood (1972) discusses in *Survival* have their beginning in settler writing and remain influential even today, it is important to recognize that Canadian society in the 21st century is characterized by multiculturalism and the country's literature is today defined by its plurality. Reading *Survival* in this connection raises issues of race, ethnicity and marginalization, and these will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, the first of which focuses on the representation of Canada as a multicultural society in *Survival*.

2.2 Multi-ethnicity and cultural hybridity

While *Survival* focuses on the concerns of the Anglo-Canadian pioneering communities and on how these are reflected in English-Canadian literature, its paradigms hardly apply to all Canadian writing; rather, the study can be perceived as perpetuating the system of dominance created under colonial rule in its focus on the European settler experience (New 1997: 80; Brydon 2004: 171). The Canadian society of today, as well as contemporary Canadian literature, are characterized by their plurality resulting from the fusion of cultures and ethnicities, which has resulted in a frequent questioning of the master narrative of Canadian history as a white settler nation as well as problematizing

the notions of home and belonging in Canada (Howells 2004: 197; Redekop 2004: 267–268). For instance, in her article 'Geography lessons: On being and insider/outsider to the Canadian nation,' originally published in 1997, Himani Bannerji notes Atwood's complicity in promoting the master narrative as official history. Although not suggesting that the idea originated in Atwood's writings, Bannerji (2004: 296–297) argues that it was 'the notion of survival' – in other words, the idea of the white settler as a victim of imperialism – that legitimized an Anglo-White hegemony in Canadian society. The later representation of Canada as a nation defined by its multiculturalism is, according to her (2004: 291, 296), an Anglo-Canadian fabrication with the purpose of avoiding conflict with Canada's others, and a policy that leads to marginalization rather than equality between different ethnic communities.[13]

Furthermore, Bannerji (2004: 290) argues, as Canadianness is defined by the dominant group, a 'Canadian' has come to denote someone who is white and from a European background, which leaves non-white Canadians in a constant state of belonging/non-belonging as they do not fit the definition, but are nevertheless citizens of the nation. Similar observations are made by Mridula Nath Chakraborty (2003) in 'Nostalgic narratives and the Otherness industry' and Chelva Kanaganayakam (2003) in 'Cool dots and hybrid Scarborough: Multiculturalism as Canadian myth', who both argue that for the postcolonial migrant, the problem with Canada's policy of multiculturalism is connected with a sense of belonging: they never quite belong in the nation in which they are seen as the exotic Other, although they officially belong in Canada by way of receiving citizenship. While Atwood's (1972) lack of discussion on non-white immigrant experience can be attributed to the small amount of non-white immigrant writing at the time of *Survival*'s publication (see e.g. Hunter 1996: 33–35, 38–40), the study includes a chapter on 20th century immigrant writing, which focuses on the issues

[13] The Canadian official policy of multiculturalism has been widely debated and critiqued especially by non-white literary and cultural critics ever since the Multiculturalism Act of 1988 was passed (see Moss 2003: 13-14 for a brief overview of the issues raised). The policy as well as the subsequent debate are outside the scope of this thesis, suffice it to say that the policy certainly seems to have been effective in putting a stop to the assimilation policies of earlier governments, and in enforcing ethnic communities' right to maintain their cultural heritage and traditions alive, which some commentators, like those cited here, argue results in non-belonging and ghettoization.

since raised by Chakraborty (2003), Kanaganayakam (2003) and Bannerji (2004). This would suggest that the author is aware that definitions of Canada and Canadianness are diverse and cannot be represented by Anglo-Canadian writing alone.

According to Atwood (1972: 149–158), the difficulty of belonging in Canada and negotiating between the values of the old and the new society is a situation portrayed in novels by immigrants of *any* origin, not just non-white Canadians. For 20th century immigrants from various places of origin the problems with identity and belonging between two cultures become a dilemma that refuses them full access to the Canadian society dominated by 'those earlier immigrants, the WASPs and the French' (Atwood 1972: 149), precisely as Bannerjee (2004), Chakraborty (2003) and Kanaganayakanam (2003) suggest. Moreover, Atwood (1972: 149) argues that in 20th century immigrant writing the dominant locale changes as 'hostile cities replace hostile forests,' and in fact today the cityscape is considered to be a typical setting in writing focusing on minority positions, as writers seek to challenge the dominant wilderness images of Canada (New 1997: 127; Gunew 2008: 13). The city space then, becomes a site of struggle to either succumb to marginalization or to assimilate, and Atwood (1972: 149, 154) maintains, along with Kanaganayakam (2003: 144–145), that there is a generational divide in the process of settling in the new society, with the first generation of immigrants trying to maintain the cultural heritage of their home country and the later generations negotiating between the values of both societies. This division also becomes clear in Miriam Toews's novel, which portrays a Canadian Mennonite community where the older generations remain faithful to cultural heritage while young people show a desire for change and assimilation in the mainstream culture.

In 'Serial accommodations: Diasporic women's writing' Sneja Gunew (2008: 9) furthermore notes that the 'generational transmission' of both cultural heritage and minority status means that even third or fourth generation immigrants are usually spoken of as hyphenated Canadians and strongly associated with their diasporic communities. These communities, however, are as imagined as the nation (Gunew 2008: 9), a point which Atwood (1972: 151–152) makes in her analysis of two stories by Austin Clarke in which the protagonists, black West Indian immigrants, refuse both

the diasporic community of other black immigrants as well as the white Canadian society. In fact, as Gunew (2008: 9–11) notes, gaining access to Canadian society is to a large extent made impossible for diasporic immigrants by their forced inclusion in imagined diasporic communities and the general focus on ethnicity, whereas in reality the immigrant subjects balance between the dominant national culture and that of their heritage. This view is also expressed by Atwood (1972: 149, 154–155), who argues that striking that balance may be possible only from the third generation onwards; while the earlier generations of immigrant families are faced with two 'chief obstacles to success – rejecting the new land altogether, and being destructively assimilated by it,' the third generation may be able to negotiate between the two.

Thus Atwood touches the notion of cultural hybridity, which some critics, such as Smaro Kamboureli, Barbara Godard and Brian Crow have suggested is a paradigmatic concept and condition in contemporary postcolonial Canadian writing (see Macfarlane 2003: 224; Zucchero 2003: 256). Cultural hybridity, according to Bhabha (1994: 111–115), who writes about the concept in relation to colonial discourse and power, does not simply denote a hyphenated identity, but is a condition that affects the colonial culture as a whole. For him (1994: 111), hybridity is a product of colonial power with its authority relying on discriminatory practices that are based on the idea of difference between the colonizer and the colonized populations. In the Canadian context, hybridity is a concept that relates to the process of invading/settling, to the colonial moment of the disavowal of Indigenous cultures as well as the fact of invasion – notions of Canada as empty space, of the Indigenous populations as savage – that Lawson (2004: 155–157) among many others sees as the basis for European authority in Canada. On the other hand, it also relates to the existence of other marginalized and disavowed knowledges, as diasporic immigrants enter a country governed by a hegemonic group of people. The colonized and/or discriminated populations are represented through negative images in order to secure the right to domination, but the persisting of cultures and knowledges in existence prior to the moment of colonization disturbs and destabilizes the discourse of colonial power, because the dominated fuse together their worldview and the discourse of the colonizer, creating a mutation, a colonial hybrid that thoroughly questions the validity of European discourse and colonial authority (Bhabha 1994: 111–113).

Hybridity is thus the product of, but also resistant to colonial authority, and therefore affects colonial culture as a whole (Bhabha 1994: 112). Nevertheless, Karen E. Macfarlane (2003: 224) argues that hybridity as a concept is a problematic approach to Canadian writing in the case of Euro-Canadian writers, whose identities are not formed as a result of the fusion of different cultures. On the other hand, Amy Kroeker (2003: 239) notes that not all English-speaking Canadians of European background belong to a dominant majority and that questions of hybridity are a concern to marginal groups of Euro-Canadians as much as to non-white immigrants, as Atwood (1972) suggests, too. In her discussion of the 'internally peripheral […] position' which Mennonites occupy 'within the larger group of "white Canadians",' Kroeker (2003: 239–241) argues that their historical and cultural heritage links them to discussions of both settler culture and cultural hybridity. Because of their history of immigration and exile from Europe to settlements in Canada, Canadian Mennonites participated in the imperial invasion on Indigenous lands. However, their insistence on linguistic, geographical and cultural separation from the majority, and the subsequent assimilation policies of the Canadian government that have affected Mennonite culture, also suggest hybridized identities and culture. (Kroeker 2003: 240–241.) Thus contemporary Mennonite writing resonates with the multicultural issues of Canadian society, as I will show below in my discussion of *A Complicated Kindness*.

Hence, in her chapter on immigrant writing, Atwood (1972) engages in a discussion that is today highly topical in Canadian postcolonial discourse, because in the Canadian context, the issues of hybridization and marginalization are not limited to diasporic immigrants, as the Indigenous populations too are even today an oppressed minority (Gunew 2008: 9). In fact, Atwood (1972: 97) notes that in Canadian fiction 'the Indian emerges […] as the ultimate victim of social oppression,' but in respect to the Indigenous views of the first encounters or their understanding of the Canadian locale *Survival* has little to offer. There is a chapter-length analysis of how 'an imported white man looks at a form of *natural* or native life alien to himself and appropriates it for symbolic purposes' (Atwood 1972: 91, emphasis mine). Atwood's (1972: 91) justification for not discussing Indigenous texts is that '[u]ntil very recently, Indians and

Eskimos [sic] made their only appearances in Canadian literature in books written by white writers' because only a small amount of Indigenous writing had been published at that point. In the early 1970s Indigenous peoples indeed had very little access to mainstream publishing (Hunter 1996: 40–42), and since orature did not fit European definitions of literature, the oral story-telling traditions of the Indigenous populations were not considered valuable (Van Toorn 2004: 24). Despite her exclusion of the Indigenous viewpoint from her study, I would argue that Atwood's (1972: 91–104) section on the representation of the Indigene in Canadian writing is important because it records how Canadian authors repeatedly equate the Indigenous populations with the Canadian land. This, as I will suggest in the following chapters, was another imperial trope that has even affected contemporary Canadian society and literature.

2.3 Indigenous issues and Canadian postcolonialism.

The representation of the Indigenous peoples as part of the land is, according to New (1997: 70) 'one of the most pervasive of Canadian literary tropes,' as suggested by the quotation from *Survival* cited above. Henderson (2000c) argues that this notion authorized the colonization of Indigenous cultures in the name of progress, since the Hobbesian 17th century notion of the 'state of nature' as the first evolutionary stage of human society – a stage in which people lacked the capacity for morality, law, culture and rationality – affected the way the Europeans perceived Indigenous peoples worldwide (Henderson 2000c: 15–18). As noted above, Bhabha (1994: 111–113) suggests that the colonial discourse of European authority relied on the negative representations of the dominated and the colonized, and Henderson (2000c: 27–28) proposes that the notion of Indigenous peoples as 'savages' or 'barbarians' provided the colonizing settlers with the basis for breaking the treaties that the British Empire had previously made with the Indigenous inhabitants of North America. Because the Indigenous communities had no law or government that met European standards, the European settlers saw it as their mission to introduce the them to 'civil' society (Henderson 2000a; 2000c: 27–28). This does not mean, however, that Indigenous societies were not organized at all; according to archaeologists Kenneth Ames and

Wayne Suttles (1997: 255, 259) the societies of the northwest coast, for example, were socially stratified, and the Haisla were at the time of contact organized in kin groups in a system that identified everyone in the community.

The Indigenous worldviews and languages in place before the arrival of Europeans had formed in relation to the particular ecologies in which the different tribes lived (Henderson 2000a: 259). Atwood does seem to recognize the difference between the Indigenous view of the land and that of settlers, as she (1972: 103) suggests that the Indigenous peoples are often portrayed 'as mediator[s] between the whites and a Nature which is life-giving rather than death-dealing.' In Indigenous philosophy, humans and nature were not considered separate but part of each other, and the Earth was the beginning of all creation in a state of constant transformation or flux (Henderson 2000a: 252, 256–259; Little Bear 2000: 77–78). As Indigenous worldviews were learnt both orally and by the personal experience of living in a community, the transmission of these values and traditions was greatly affected by colonial rule. Imperial laws and policies illegalized ceremonies and separated the children from their tribes in the name of formal education, which often prohibited them from learning Indigenous languages as well as cultural heritage. (New 1997: 33–34; Henderson 2000a: 266; Little Bear 2000: 81–82, 84.) Many of these issues are also brought to attention in *Monkey Beach*, in which the protagonist slowly finds out about the past of her colonized community, and in fact, Indigenous thinkers and writers are today seeking to restore Indigenous knowledges as well as revive oral traditions in an attempt to resist colonialism and Eurocentric thought, which continue to affect their lives (Battiste 2000: xvi; Henderson 2000b: 73; Van Toorn 2004: 24–25, 41–44).

However, Canadian postcolonial theorists remain careful not to suggest including Indigenous theory in the field, as many Indigenous writers and critics in Canada have in fact refused a Eurocentric, academic postcolonial approach altogether.[14] Nevertheless, Judith Leggatt (2003: 117, 119–121) insists that a postcolonial approach to Indigenous

[14] See, for example, Thomas King's 1990 article 'Godzilla vs. Post-colonial', Lee Maracle's 'The "Post-colonial' Imagination' (1992), and Marie Battiste's (2000) introduction to the collection of essays entitled *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*.

writing can be fruitful as long as critics remain aware that the white academic's reading of 'other' literatures, such as Indigenous writing, is also necessarily 'an act of translation' between differing cultures and worldviews, and that it is possible that academic critics misunderstand Indigenous texts. She (2003: 122, 125) concludes that critics need to get more acquainted with Indigenous methodologies while recognizing that they are not themselves Indigenous and thus cannot understand the Indigenous worldview thoroughly. This suggestion is highly relevant to the present study, as one of the novels analysed below, *Monkey Beach*, was written by the Indigenous writer, and therefore, in this context, defining what is meant by 'postcolonialism' in my study becomes of increasing importance.

Following the suggestions of Leggatt (2003: 117, 120, 125) I consider 'postcolonial theory' as an anti-imperial, decolonizing process, and as Brydon (2003: 55) suggests, for this process to be effective in Canada, theorists need to emphasize multiple ways of remembering and recognize that 'the settler colony serves as an unstable site for memories.' Thus, reconsidering Canadian history through the private and public memory of those who have previously been silenced would, as an approach to contemporary Canadian writing, take into consideration the diversity of truths that constitute Canada. Bhabha's (1992, 1994) concept of 'unhomeliness' in postcolonial literatures might therefore be a viable way of bridging the plurality of viewpoints on Canadian culture, as the theory focuses on revealing the way in which cultural differences and cultural displacements in (post)colonial societies are built into the literary text (Bhabha 1992: 142–146). Juxtaposed with Atwood's *Survival* as a source of cultural motifs in Canadian writing, the concept can be an approach that opens up new versions of history and identity in the reading of Canadian women's writing. The concept of unhomeliness is further explained in the following chapter, which also discusses its relation to *Survival* and the connection both theories have to the notion of home in Canadian women's writing.

3 UNHOMELINESS AND CANADIAN WOMEN'S WRITING

When Homi K. Bhabha (1992: 141) first introduces his concept of unhomeliness in his article 'The world and the home', he states that the 'awkward word […] captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world.' According to Bhabha (1992: 141–142), a sense of unhomeliness typically informs colonial and postcolonial literatures, and manifests itself in 'unhomely moments' which do not suggest homelessness but rather a sense of non-belonging that manifests itself in a character or a setting, and that makes using traditional Eurocentric forms of categorization and analysis difficult. In fact, these unhomely moments in literature occur when personal, psychic histories are placed side by side with the received master narratives of historical time and social discourse, blurring the boundaries of the home and the world, the private and the public, introducing 'another world' through the literary depictions of social, historical and cultural displacements (Bhabha 1992: 141). In other words, unhomeliness disrupts the traditional spheres of spatial and historical representation, creating an interstitial reality which challenges the historical master narratives that social and cultural identities are based on. At the same time it reveals the existence of hybridity, thus problematizing unitary notions of identity and subjectivity with a sense of in-betweenness. (Bhabha 1992: 143–144, 148–149.)

Returning to the concept in his introduction to *The Locations of Culture*, Bhabha (1994: 10) remarks that the term 'unhomely' derives from Freud's (1919) *unheimlich*, usually translated as 'uncanny', as the English title of Freud's essay suggests. For Freud, *unheimlich* receives its meaning from the seemingly opposing term *heimlich*, which refers both to the homelike or familiar and to secrecy, with the latter meaning of *heimlich* actually making the opposites synonymous. (Freud 2001: 154–157.) One of the instances where *unheimlich* manifests itself in literature is, according to Freud (2001: 162), the idea of the double, which 'was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego' in the early stages of mental development but has later been repressed. Thus, the figure of the double disturbs the ego, creating a sense of *unheimlich*, something foreign and unfamiliar in the self. Hence, *unheimlich* moments in literature are usually caused by the resurfacing of already repressed phases in the formation of the ego – in

other words, a regression to the earlier stages of the development of identity. (Freud 2001: 162–163.) The *unheimlich*, being a reflection of 'something repressed which *recurs*' (Freud 2001: 166), is therefore not thoroughly unfamiliar or strange; instead, it is something that once was familiar but has been forgotten. Thus Freud's *unheimlich*, connected with the processes of ego-formation and the splitting of the ego, informs Bhabha's idea of the unhomely moments in literature which surface when repressed histories are brought into the realms of the social discourse of the present.

Hence Bhabha's unhomely moments could be described as a means of un-forgetting or remembering in literature: bringing to light the traumatic instances of historical displacement and repressed knowledges that remain unspoken in the dominant representations of history and culture. Their emergence in literary texts reveals the instability of subjectivity and challenges the possibility of identification merely in terms of the binary oppositions that inform such concepts as class, gender, race and nationality. Transgressing the traditional binary spheres of civil society – the private and the public, the home and the world – unhomeliness makes visible the existence of in-between identities or double selves by relocating and blurring the spatial and psychic boundaries of the personal and the political. (Bhabha 1992: 143–144, 148–149; 1994: 9–13.) Moreover, as Bhabha (1992: 142) maintains that 'the "unhomely" is a paradigmatic post-colonial [sic] experience,' I assume that the concept will prove useful in the context of *Survival* and Canadian writing as well. In fact, Sugars (2004a: xiii, xix–xx) proposes that a sense of unhomeliness is a common feature in diverse Canadian postcolonial texts from the early anti-colonial resistance texts to 1970s cultural nationalism and present-day investigations into questions of race, ethnicity and the hybridity of Canadian culture, locating unhomeliness in the various expressions of in-betweenness and liminality in Canadian postcolonial criticism.

Although Sugars (2004a) does not refer to Bhabha at all, she seems to be dealing with the concept of unhomeliness as defined by Bhabha in the articles discussed above, and she is not the only one to make the connection between unhomeliness and Canadian writing. If only mentioning it in brief, New (1997: 96–98) points to the concept in his analysis of the language of nostalgia used in the anthropomorphic nature and animal

tales of the early 20th century. He (1997: 98) remarks that 'Bhabha's comments on "unhomely lives" […] are relevant here,' because Bhabha (1994: 9) insists that the unhomely, as an approach to postcolonial cultures, resists nationalistic nostalgia whereby '"roots" [are] struck in the celebratory romance of the past' in the process of asserting cultural independence. On the other hand, Charlotte Sturgess (2003: 47) sees unhomeliness as a marker of 'the dispossessed Self' in the process of immigration, referring to Bhabha's (1994: 9) comment that unhomeliness 'is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations,' which makes it relevant to both the settler and the marginalized migrant alike. Furthermore, previously marginalized groups of Canadian writers have increasingly begun to challenge the dominant imperial images of Canadian land and the literary tropes that Atwood (1972) described, with women writers in particular resisting the gendered fictions of conquering the wilderness and their implication of the sexual conquest of a static object (New 1997: 38–39, 114; Sturgess 2003: 14–15). Bhabha (1992) in fact suggests that unhomeliness is especially related to postcolonial women's writing, which is also the focus of my study, and therefore the next section, in its discussion of the connections between *Survival* and unhomeliness, specifically concentrates on women's writing discussed in *Survival*. The subsequent sections furthermore concentrate on contemporary issues in Canadian women's writing, with special attention paid to the notions of home and belonging.

3.1 Unhomeliness and women's writing in *Survival*

The existence of multiple versions of history, reality and cultural identities manifests itself in literary texts as unhomely moments, which imply a questioning of the binaries that social discourse rests on, and a move further, to the hybrid, in-between realities of ambivalent subjectivity (Bhabha 1994: 9–10, 17–18). Such moments can be located in the discussion of Canadian women's writing in *Survival*, and they appear in texts ranging from portrayals of settler liminality to marginalization in contemporary society. One instance is the 'double-minded attitude' that, according to Atwood (1972: 51), characterizes Susanna Moodie's descriptions of Canada. Moodie, the genteel wife of an English settler, is best known for her book of sketches called *Roughing It in the Bush*,

published in 1852, which describes her experiences of settlement life in Canada (Atwood 1972: 50–51; New 1997: 68, 89; Mathews 2010). Atwood (1972: 50–51) quotes two paragraphs from the book, in which Moodie first marvels at nature, the 'Divine Mother,' but then goes on to state that she feels imprisoned in her new environment. Attributing this inconsistency to the tension between the settler's expectations and the actual reality of the colonial settlement, Atwood (1972: 50–51) argues that the European ideas of what nature was supposed to be like were also affected by the literary conventions of the time.

New (1997: 68–71) agrees, noting that because Moodie had been trained to use certain kinds of vocabulary and literary tropes to describe nature, these conventions also affected how she saw the landscape. However it is Moodie's immediate surroundings and everyday life, not the Canadian landscape, that cause her to feel uneasy about the Canadian bush (Atwood 1972: 51; New 1997: 70–71). While New (1997: 70–71) concentrates especially on Moodie's attempt to cope with the family's shack of a house, more of an 'absence' than a home compared to what Moodie is used to, Atwood discusses how the settlement life at large poses a problem for Moodie:

> Again and again we find her gazing at the sublime natural goings-on in the misty distance – sunsets, mountains, spectacular views – only to be brought up short by disagreeable things in her immediate foreground, such as bugs, swamps, tree roots and other immigrants. (Atwood 1972: 51.)

Trying to turn the strange, unordered wilderness into a home reveals to Moodie the European misconceptions that her expectations of the New World are based on, questioning the limits of her knowledge of the world, making the experience a thoroughly unhomely one.

When Moodie is forced to acknowledge that her perception of reality is a product of European discourse that is at odds with her new surroundings, 'home' is revealed to be an unstable referent, and Bhabha's (1992: 141) comment on the unhomely reflecting the 'social effects of enforced social accommodation' also have relevance here. Atwood's (1972: 51) quotation from Moodie displays the unhomely world of the reluctant female

settler subject[15] by placing side by side the domestic life of a woman trying to survive in the wilderness, a space of male heroism and adventure, and her feelings of displacement. Moodie's writing 'dramatizes – in the figure of a woman – the ambivalent structure of the civil State as it draws its rather paradoxical boundary between the private and the public spheres' (Bhabha 1994: 10). For her, the wilderness does not represent the male world of imperial adventure, but a space in which the private sphere of 'home' becomes one of confinement and imprisonment, resulting in a sense of unhomeliness that reflects her dislocation and alienation. Moodie's 'double-minded attitude' thus bears a mark of the splitting of the liminal settler subject for whom, in the frontier conditions of the settler colony, 'another world becomes visible' (Bhabha 1992: 141) – a world in which she both tries to begin a new life, and where she, at the same time, does not feel at home.

Alice Munro also represents hidden histories in her 1971 novel *Lives of Girls and Women*. Munro, who began her writing career in the 1960s, is mainly known as a writer of short stories depicting women's lives in rural environments, and she has won several literary awards for her fiction. *Lives of Girls and Women*, though, was published as a novel, and as such it is the author's only one to date. (Howells 2004: 198, 200; Blodgett 2010.) The young narrator of Munro's novel, the aspiring writer Del Jordan, challenges the colonial narrative of Canada by 'choos[ing] to write from the centre of her own experience' (Atwood 1972: 193). Although this means giving up the European tradition of Gothic in favour of her own space, her rural hometown (Atwood 1972: 193), it also means abandoning her uncle's chronicles of local history, which focus on important townsmen, in order to show the private sphere of society, the lives of girls and women (Howells 2004: 200–201). Del's declaration of independence as an artist thus has both postcolonial and feminist implications: '[N]o list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together – radiant and everlasting' (Munro quoted in Atwood 1972: 193). From a postcolonial

[15] The Moodies emigrated mainly because of their poor economic situation, and Susanna Moodie repeatedly expresses regret for having left her home country behind in *Roughing It in the Bush* (New 1997: 75; Mathews 2010).

perspective, Del's decision to take as the subject matter of her writing the everyday lives of ordinary people living in the fictional Canadian small town called Jubilee poses a challenge to the hegemonic European literary tradition by asserting the particular locale not as a mere periphery of the centre but as a place worth writing about.

Furthermore, juxtaposed with her decision to give up European literary traditions, the above quotation highlights the particularity of the rural Canadian experience as something that cannot be articulated in conventional European modes of writing, thus hinting at the notion of colonial hybridity. On the other hand, the focus on female characters and the aspects of their everyday lives brings to attention the domestic sphere of society, and rejoices in women's experience and knowledge of the world in a way that thoroughly questions male literary portrayals of femininity. Challenging dominant discourses, and the blurring of traditional binary divisions of the personal and the political, the private and the public, is what relates Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* to the notion of unhomeliness. As Bhabha (1992: 148) notes, these spheres, though traditionally conceived of as 'spatially opposed,' in fact transgress boundaries; the home is not only a private sphere but defined by its location in the world, by public discourse and politics. In Del's narrative, as in Susanna Moodie's description of the female settler experience, 'the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions' (Bhabha 1992: 141) as the stories of women's experiences are juxtaposed to the realities and fictions of patriarchal society, showing that the development and instability of personal identity is very much connected to the realms of social discourse.

Atwood's analyses of Canadian women's writing point to yet another connection between *Survival* and Bhabha's theory, namely their concern with the notion of home. Bhabha's (1992: 141, 148–149) suggestion that the unhomely moments in literature reveal the ambivalent nature of those binary oppositions, such as the private and the public, that social discourse is based on, is connected with the idea that home, traditionally considered a private sphere, is the place of revelation of the unhomely other world, an in-between space which transgresses culturally constructed boundaries: what is deemed personal and private, is in fact political. However, for Atwood the

whole notion of home is difficult, as Canada poses the problem of home and belonging not only to the 20th century immigrant but Canadians at large, and a sense of non-belonging is a definitive Canadian condition that shapes most Canadian writing. The complexity of defining 'home' in a Canadian context has also begun to interest literary theorists, although the ideas of home and belonging have so far been discussed mainly in reference to contemporary immigrant writing (see Howells 2004: 210; Redekop 2004: 268; Gunew 2009). Nevertheless, the notion of home is a central locus of inquiry in much contemporary Canadian women's writing, as I will show in the following chapters, the first of which discusses the notion of home in a postcolonial Canadian context while relating the considerations of home and belonging to the concept of unhomeliness and *Survival*.

3.2 The notion of home in a Canadian context

The shifting notions of home are central to contemporary theoretical discussions on Canadian postcolonial writing (Macfarlane 2003: 223–224), and I would further argue that the difficulty of defining 'home' in a Canadian context is strongly linked to the 'unhomeliness of the locale' that Sugars (2004a: xiii) speaks of. For the early settlers the idea of home may have been connected to their problematic relation to the imperial binaries of home/away and here/there (Slemon 2004: 147–148), as well as their inauthentic connection to the land (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 135–137), as Atwood (1972: 53–54, 62, 120–124) demonstrates in her discussion of the sense of alienation and exile the settlers felt while attempting to construct a relationship with the land by trying to build a mimicry of Europe in the Canadian wilderness – considered hostile and monstrous because it was different from nature 'back home'. In the previous section, the settler's sense of unhomeliness and their difficulties with the idea of home was discussed in relation to Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, which Christa Zeller Thomas (2009: 106) in fact reads as a record of 'Moodie's lasting discomfort with the notion of home in Canada'. 'Home' is a difficult concept for the settlers since their emigration suggests loss and exile, while the process of settling is invested with hope and desire for a new home (Zeller Thomas 2009: 106). The settler position thus reflects

the kind of in-betweenness that, according to Bhabha (1994: 9), is typical of portrayals of 'home' in postcolonial fictions of migrancy and marginalization.

In Canadian writing of the late 20th century, however, 'home' began to be seen as a complex concept that could not be discussed only in relation to imperial binaries (Macfarlane 2003: 223). Macfarlane (2003: 223–224) proposes that the ambiguous articulations of 'home' which theorize Canadian space and subject as outside or in-between the imperial binaries of home/away and colonizer/colonized connect the Euro-Canadian writing of today to postcolonial discussions of nation, identity and master narratives. Reading colonial Canadian space as a heterotopia,[16] Macfarlane (2003: 226–227) states that 'here, it is the *space*, not the subject, that becomes invested with the preoccupations of the imperial centre.' Because of this, 'home' is never a stable concept, since '[t]he voice from *within* the heterotopia neither negates the idealized, "othered" status of the Eurocentric vision, nor wholly participates in it' (Macfarlane 2003: 226–227). In other words, the subject's relation to, and understanding of 'home' is negotiated through both the imperial, Eurocentric notions of Canadian space and history as well as the position of the postcolonial Canadian subject.

However, for Bhabha (1992: 141–143, 147–149), the idea of 'home' as the space of revelation of hybridity and unhomeliness is strongly connected to the image of the house. Bhabha's (1992: 141–143,146–147) unhomely 'House[s] of Fiction' in the novels of Henry James, Toni Morrison, V.S. Naipaul and Nadine Gordimer, among others, are invested with slave memories, lies and secrecy, darkness, violence, feelings of dislocation and 'unspeakable thoughts, unspoken' (Morrison quoted in Bhabha 1992: 142), which ultimately reveal how the domestic space, traditionally thought of as a personal and private sphere of life, is affected by and becomes a part of the political. According to Zeller Thomas (2009: 106) the figure of the house 'represents the

[16] 'Heterotopia' is a concept of Michel Foucault, introduced in his essay 'Of Other Spaces' based on a lecture given in 1967. Heterotopic spaces are 'counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 2002: 231). He (2002: 235) goes on to suggest that heterotopic spaces exist in every culture, and are considered as 'other' spaces in relation to the 'real' spaces within the culture, and that some colonies have functioned as heterotopias in relation to the imperial centres.

stronghold of colonial presence in a settler society,' and in Atwood's (120–124) discussion of the settling process, the image of the house becomes an embodiment of the settlers' desire to construct a new version of Europe in the New World wilderness as well as the often failing attempts to tame the perceived chaos of the Canadian landscape. The binary opposition of house/land informs investigations into ideas of home even in contemporary Canadian fiction, and 'home' in Canada continues to be associated with images of wilderness (New 1997: 120, 126). On the other hand, the traditional wilderness images have also implied women's confinement to the domestic sphere (Sturgess 2003: 21), and thus the figure of the house in women's writing may reflect the unhomeliness Bhabha (1992) associates with the image.

In fact, the houses in the Canadian women's writing discussed in *Survival* also become the kind of unhomely spaces of domestic imprisonment and haunting that Bhabha (1992) claims fictional (post)colonial houses are. They reveal the effects of colonization, as in Margaret Laurence's *The Fire-Dwellers*, in which the Métis woman Piquette and her children are burnt alive in their 'shack' of abandonment and alcoholism (Atwood 1972: 98); they are houses of madness, like in Atwood's own poem 'Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer' where the settler trying to build a house in the wilderness is bushed,[17] or in Joyce Marshall's story 'The Old Woman' in which the protagonist Molly's husband falls in love with a powerhouse machine (Atwood 1972: 124, 204–205); and they are houses of secrecy and entrapment, as in Mavis Gallant's short story 'The Legacy' or Sheila Watson's novel *The Double Hook*, both of which feature a female protagonist who inherits a house full of secrets or even ghosts from their mothers (Atwood 1972: 132–133, 202–203). In all these examples, the houses are spaces in which the home and the world become part of each other, and Atwood (1972: 209) even envisions the female characters in Canadian fiction as occupying houses where the personal and the political collide. Discussing 'The Rapunzel Syndrome' as a universal pattern in modern women's writing, where women are trapped in the tower of society and no prince will come to the rescue, Atwood (1972: 209–210) suggests that in the case of Canadian women's writing, the women's imprisonment is inescapable

[17] A Canadian term implying that someone has gone crazy when isolated in the wilderness.

because ‘in Canada, *Rapunzel and the tower are the same*.’ In other words, the political and the public are internalized by the female characters and have begun to define their lives to the extent that the personal and private are suppressed.

In fact, 21st century Canadian women authors frequently focus on remote, rural settings with rebelling adolescent protagonists at the centre of the story (Howells 2004: 211), much like Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women*, discussed above. They thus continue the Canadian women writers’ theme of artistic and alienated teenage girls who are suppressed by their communities and long for an escape (Brandt 2005: 21; Steffler 2009: 126), a cultural motif which can be associated with the Rapunzel Syndrome or the processes of artistic expression in a cultural colony (see Atwood 1972: 184–190, 209–210). Both Eden Robinson and Miriam Toews utilize this motif, as well as other Canadian themes studied in *Survival*, while describing the experience of dwelling in rural locations in Canada from the perspective of a teenager belonging to a marginalized minority. Significantly, both novels also continue the Canadian tradition of women’s writing with intertextual elements linking them to two specific 1970s women’s novels: *Monkey Beach* can be read as a 21st century ‘revisiting’ of Atwood’s celebrated 1972 novel *Surfacing* (Howells 2004: 211), and Toews (CK: 71) makes a connection between the story of Nomi and Munro’s *The Lives of Girls and Women*. Moreover, the central themes in both novels, negotiating home and belonging while playing with various kinds of in-betweenness and hybridity, also connect them to Bhabha’s theory of unhomeliness, as I will show in the following two chapters. In my analysis, I present a reading of *Monkey Beach* and *A Complicated Kindness* that places the novels in a dialogue with the Canadian literary tradition described by Atwood in *Survival*, and looks at the novels in relation to notions of home and unhomeliness. The following chapter concentrates on Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*, and *A Complicated Kindness* is the main object of analysis in chapter five of my study.

4. INDIGENOUS UNHOMELINESS IN EDEN ROBINSON'S *MONKEY BEACH*

A complicated narrative structure and the fusion of modern realism with descriptions of Haisla traditions and orature have led critics to categorize *Monkey Beach* (2000), among others, as a *bildungsroman*, a Gothic story, and trickster writing (Lane 2003). As a wilderness quest the novel, like its 1972 predecessor *Surfacing*,[18] challenges literary tropes typical in portraying the Canadian landscape, as well as many of the traditional wilderness myths, especially that of the wilderness as a male space, by depicting it from the point of view of an adolescent Indigenous female narrator. The narrative structure and the plot of *Monkey Beach* also bear resemblance to *Surfacing*, as both novels, like that of Miriam Toews' to be discussed in chapter five, centre around the search of a missing family member. The nameless first person narrator of Atwood's novel is trying to find out what happened to her father in the backwoods of Quebec on a quest which ultimately becomes a search for the self through flashbacks into the narrator's childhood and adolescence, exactly like Lisamarie's journey in *Monkey Beach*. Yet, although both novels rewrite the Canadian wilderness, their points of view are different: while Atwood's *Surfacing* is a quest both for a missing person and for Canadian identity in the face of American cultural imperialism, Robinson's *Monkey Beach* sets out looking for Indigenous identity in neo-colonial Canada.

The story-now of the novel, told in present tense, takes the reader on boat trip from Lisamarie's hometown Kitamaat Village to Monkey Beach while the protagonist travels through important Haisla locations along the coast in pursuit of her brother. The multiple flashbacks to Lisamarie's childhood and youth, relating the growth and coming-of-age of Lisamarie in the manner of a *bildungsroman*, also partake in the process of remembering forgotten histories and re-connecting with the past through the personal history of a voice thus far repressed,[19] which Bhabha (1992) sees as a pressing

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[18] Subsequent references are to the 1979 Virago Press edition.

[19] Robinson was the first Haisla novelist to be published, and *Monkey Beach* was the second of two books by Haisla authors depicting specifically the Haisla people and their traditions. The first one was a collection of Haisla orature entitled *Tales of Kitamaat*, written by Eden Robinson's uncle William Gordon Robinson, published in 1956. (Soper-Jones 2010: 18.)

task for both the postcolonial critic and the writer. Thus *Monkey Beach*, while mourning the loss of traditional Haisla culture, also engages in the process of healing by recognizing and recording Haisla orature, shamanism, and traditional ecological knowledge. Battiste (2000: xviii-xix) considers this to be the most important project of Indigenous postcolonialism that 'attempts to restore Indigenous knowledge and heritage' (Battiste 2000: xvi). Yet, as Rob Appleford (2005) and Kit Dobson (2009) note, the novel questions the possibility of 'authentic' Indigeneity in contemporary Canada, as Indigenous cultures are hybridized and under pressure to survive.

The present of the narrative is furthermore punctuated by what Richard J. Lane (2003) describes as parodies of self-help manuals, three lessons on how to contact the dead (MB: 139, 179, 212), and numerous explanations of the workings of the human heart, leading up to a description of how a heart attack happens (MB: 163, 191, 275). While both of these address and instruct the reader in the second person, these 'lessons' also juxtapose two kinds of medicine: Haisla shamanism and Western science. This is a significant theme of the novel, as Robinson suggests, that the shamanistic abilities of the protagonist exceed Western technology in capability and cannot be explained away by Western psychology. As I will argue below, the juxtaposition and collision of these different kinds of knowledge constitute a part of Robinson's discussion of the limits of knowledge and absolute truth. Lane (2003) in fact reads the lessons on contacting the dead as one instance of trickster writing in *Monkey Beach*; a style of writing which functions like the trickster figure in Indigenous mythology. The trickster, a figure through which traditions are taught and lessons learned, and whose form varies in different cultures from Coyote to Crow to Raven in the case of the Haisla, is a force in nature that bends gender and is full of paradox, representing powers of transformation and change as well as encouraging new interpretation (Henderson 2000b: 73, Lane 2003). As my analysis suggests, in this respect both *Monkey Beach* and its protagonist can be seen to perform the task of the trickster.

Mixing modern forms of writing with elements of orature is typical of contemporary Canadian Indigenous writing and can be confusing for non-Indigenous readers as it increases the possibility of misinterpreting the text (Van Toorn 2004: 24). In fact, critics

such as Sugars (2004b), Appleford (2005), and Ella Soper-Jones (2010) seem to disagree, among other things, on the meaning of stories about the mythological creature *b'gwus*, more commonly known as *sasquatch*, in the novel.[20] All three note that Robinson remains careful not to discuss her references to Haisla culture in full detail, and refer to interviews where Robinson insists that authors are not supposed to write about Haisla culture with total freedom (Sugars 2004b: 77–79; Appleford 87–88, 95; Soper-Jones 2010: 17.) As I have very little reliable knowledge about Haisla culture apart from the information included in the narrative of *Monkey Beach*, if the novel indeed can be considered a reliable guide, I will not claim to be able to understand all the implications of Haisla orature. Instead, I adhere to Leggatt's (2003: 121) notion of the Western academic reading of Indigenous writing as an act of translation and will try to remain aware that my reading of the novel can only ever be an interpretation that attempts to negotiate cultural differences.

In the beginning of *Monkey Beach* Robinson aptly reminds non-Haisla readers of this fact, as the narrator hears crows in the trees speak to her in Haisla and tries to remember what their words mean: 'Six crows sit in our greengage tree. Half-awake, I hear them speak to me in Haisla. […] *La'es* – Go down to the bottom of the ocean. The word means something else, *but I can't remember what*' (MB: 1; latter emphasis mine). The non-Haisla reader cannot, of course, recognize even the remembered meaning of *la'es*, and is thus effectively established as an unknowing outsider to be educated by Lisamarie. In Appleford's (2005: 92) reading, Lisamarie's inability to remember the full meaning of *la'es* suggests that here, 'cultural loss is remembered and confessed,' and that Robinson thus reminds the reader that Lisamarie does not represent 'authentic' Indigeneity.[21] This, however, represents precisely the nostalgia for roots in postcolonial

[20] Sugars (2004b: 88) reads the b'gwus as Lisamarie's 'psychic projection,' while Appleford (2005: 89–90) connects the figure with Tsimshian and Gitksan stories about the Wealth woman, and maintains that Lisamarie in fact represents both. Soper-Jones (2010: 18–20), on the other hand, traces references to Haisla secret societies and ceremonial dances, proposing that Lisamarie represents the renewing Cannibal figure of one such dance. However, Soper-Jones (2010: 18) duly notes 'the unreliability of sources upon which a cultural outsider is dependent on,' and my reading of the b'gwus is therefore based entirely on Robinson's own account.

[21] It is unclear what Appleford means when speaking of 'authentic' Indigeneity. He may be thinking of the kind of authenticity, implying a recoverable Indigenous past that Lawson (2004: 157) discusses. He

societies that Bhabha (1994: 9) cautions against, and instead of agreeing entirely with Appleford's (2005: 92) contention that the intention of the paragraph is to show the protagonist's 'inauthenticity' while establishing her as an unreliable Native Informant, I read the paragraph above all as an indication of the hybridity of contemporary Haisla culture. The opening of the novel is, then, a thoroughly unhomely one, revealing the existence of hidden knowledges as well as the in-between existence of Lisamarie.

It is precisely the hybridity of contemporary Haisla culture that is at stake in *Monkey Beach*, and one of the issues the novel is concerned with in this respect is the loss of the Haisla language, a topic which I will discuss in more detail in the sections below; another is the un-forgetting of traditional knowledge and Haisla medicine. Lisamarie has inherited shamanistic abilities from her mother's side of the family, but in the contemporary Haisla community, these abilities are thought to verge on insanity, and her mother denies their existence altogether (e.g. MB: 107, 154, 265–266, 272). Thus, when Lisamarie tells her parents that she has heard the crows speak in the trees, guiding her to find her brother, her mother tells her, in another example of an unhomely moment where two discourses collide, that it is '[c]learly a sign, Lisa, [...] that you need Prozac' (MB: 3). This, in fact, is the first example of Robinson's juxtaposition of two kinds of medicine, and the same attitude towards the alternative knowledge of shamanism characterizes the protagnist's parents' view of her abilities throughout the novel. Unable to understand her gift or receive detailed knowledge about Haisla shamanism in a community that has repressed knowledge of traditional spirituality in favour of European science and Christianity, Lisamarie feels like an outsider among her family and friends, and ends up trying to ignore her abilities, especially after she is taken to a psychiatrist by her parents in her early teens (MB: 272).

However, under the guidance of her grandmother Ma-ma-oo, who has not forgotten or abandoned Haisla traditions, Lisamarie gradually learns to appreciate her heritage and

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could also be referring to the ideas of authenticity in contemporary Canadian Indigenous discourse. Dobson (2009: 58–59), following Thomas King, explains that the idea of an essential and authentic Indigenous identity has emerged in Indigenous writing as it attempts to renegotiate the negative images of the Indigene created by imperial discourse.

forms of knowledge unacknowledged by most of her community. Along with Ma-ma-oo, her Uncle Mick serves as an inspiration to her, and a source of traditional knowledge which her own parents have largely chosen to forget. In fact, Robinson's portrayal of the Hill family includes a number of people who are not part of Lisamarie's immediate family but belong to the extended one, reminiscent of the kinship system that was in place before the advent of the Europeans and even after that. Yet *Monkey Beach* fits many of the patterns Atwood (1972: 131–141, 149, 154–157) finds typical of the three-generational family novels that portray modern Canada, though curiously, it has resonances of both the English-Canadian and the immigrant family novels as discussed by Atwood in *Survival*. In the following section, I will scrutinize the ways in which *Monkey Beach* adheres to the family novel patterns of *Survival* while juxtaposing Atwood's (1972) vision of Canadian families with traditional Indigenous views of the family and the now ruptured kinship system.

4.1 *Monkey Beach* as a three-generational family novel

According to Atwood (1972: 131) the most common way of portraying modern society in Canadian writing is the three-generational family novel, a genre which applies to both of the novels discussed in my thesis. In Robinson's novel, all three generations are present and correspond to Atwood's (1972: 133–136, 149, 154–157) descriptions of Canadian literary families of both settler and immigrant descent. Atwood (1972: 131–132, 135–136, 149, 154) maintains that these fictional families generally embody a Canadian wish to escape personal history and the past, seen as old-fashioned and restrictive. Thus, families in Canadian writing are seen as traps in which the individuals are caught and which they try to flee, either by shedding their Protestant settler guilt in the case of Anglo-Canadian writing or by forgetting their cultural heritage and assimilating into mainstream society in case of immigrant writing (Atwood 1972: 135–136, 149), as discussed in chapter two of the present thesis. Through the family history of the Hills Robinson furthermore shows how the political becomes personal in neo-colonial Canadian society, as the effects of colonization are reflected in the personal histories of the family members. Through the large extended family with its numerous

aunts, uncles and cousins, Robinson portrays the Haisla as the ultimate social victims caught in a cycle of victimization, which according to Atwood (1972: 97–99), is a typical way of representing Indigenous peoples in Canadian fiction.

The grandparent-generation of Robinson's novel is represented by both Ma-ma-oo and her dead husband, of whom the protagonist hears many contradicting stories. Ba-ba-oo remains in the memories of his children the kind of 'rigid, domineering Grandfather' of the Anglo-Canadian tradition Atwood (1972: 132, 134) describes, who, 'instead of pitting their force of will against the land […] [pit] it against other people, most notably their descendants'. However, while Ba-ba-oo's children remember him as abusive and prone to violence, Ma-ma-oo chooses to remember him differently: as a handsome sportsman, a hard worker and a war hero, the kind of husband every girl in the village was envious of. These memories pre-date the Second World War, where he lost his arm, making him unable to work in the traditional industries of the Haisla – fishing, hunting or wood-working – while also failing to qualify for veteran benefits because he belongs to the Indigenous population. (MB: 80–81, 173, 254.) It is then that the former canoe-racer turns into the violent savage of imperial discourse (c.f. Atwood 1972: 91–94; Henderson 2000a: 253), beating up his wife and children (MB: 80–81). Juxtaposing Ba-ba-oo's children's memories of their father with those of his wife, Robinson highlights the way in which the personal and the political collide, not as separate spheres of life but as the same, in colonial history, exactly as Bhabha (1992) suggests in his discussion of unhomeliness in postcolonial societies. Ba-ba-oo's fate has further consequences for the family as, in an effort to save two of her children from abuse, Ma-ma-oo sends Uncle Mick and Aunt Trudy to residential school, which is an experience they both look back on with resentment. Separated from their family and their cultural environment, each child reacts to the experience differently: Uncle Mick turns the trauma into empowerment and becomes a self-proclaimed 'warrior' interested in maintaining Haisla cultural heritage and fighting oppression in the American Indian Movement, while Aunt Trudy escapes into alcoholism. (MB: 59, 108–109, 254.)

The house of Ma-ma-oo, 'one of the oldest in the village' (MB: 74), thus becomes an unhomely house haunted by the colonial past, showing how 'the intimate recesses of

domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions' (Bhabha 1992: 141) in a neo-colonial society where the personal and the political are not separate spheres of life but the same. With its cracking paint, ancient windows and unkempt garden, the eerie house is thought to be haunted by everyone in the village (MB: 74–76), and it is definitely populated by the people of Ma-ma-oo's memories, the dead who come to greet her shortly before Ma-ma-oo herself dies in a fire which burns down the whole house (MB: 289, 292). The house is also the unhomely site of the kind of unspeakable secrets and colonial trauma that Bhabha (1992: 144–145, 150; 1994: 11, 13, 16) discusses in relation to unhomeliness in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*, such as Ba-ba-oo's domestic violence and its horrifying consequences. The narrative implies that Ma-ma-oo may have killed her husband, but Lisamarie cannot really believe the story, although she sees the incident in one of her dream-visions (MB: 254, 355) as 'the obscure signs of the spirit world, the sublime and the subliminal' (Bhabha 1992: 147) frequently become one of the literary means for revealing the unhomely consequences of colonial history in *Monkey Beach*. While serving as a reminder of the consequences of colonization on the Hill family, the house also makes visible Ma-ma-oo's silent resistance to European cultural influences: though her house shows signs of aging as well as Ma-ma-oo's disinterest in decorating and gardening, '[un]like the other grandmothers [Lisamarie] knew,' her fishing nets are 'immaculate' (MB: 74–75), and like the house, its owner is shown to be controversial.

As Lisamarie's guide into Haisla history, traditions and spiritual beliefs, the character of Ma-ma-oo is an embodiment of the Indigenous tradition of teaching, in which children were valued highly and taught by example and through praise (Little Bear 2000: 81). She furthermore shares the traits of Atwood's (1972: 149) first-generation immigrants, keeping alive old customs and cultural heritage, and is portrayed as a wise old woman whose positive qualities derive from the Indigenous past rather than contemporary society (cf. Atwood 1972: 154). However, for some family members the past is not something to remember, and to them, Ma-ma-oo is a guardian of other peoples' morals, infused in old-fashioned religious beliefs, that Atwood (1972: 134) maintains the grandparents of settler descent in Canadian fiction are. This is especially true in the case of Aunt Trudy, who resents Ma-ma-oo for sending her and Mick to residential school

instead of kicking out Ba-ba-oo (MB: 57–59), thus blaming someone other than the real source of her victimization, as fictional Canadians according to Atwood (1972: 37) tend to do. Aunt Trudy is not the only one to have arguments with Ma-ma-oo, as Lisamarie's parents contradict her teachings about Haisla heritage, too, and tell their daughter not to believe in her grandmother's stories (MB: 54, 194). In fact, like the second generation immigrants of Atwood (1972: 149), the protagonist's parents have tried to assimilate to English-Canadian society, though they continue to live on the reserve. Her golf-playing father has trained as an accountant but ended up working for the local aluminium plant after quitting his job because he had been passed over for promotion several times. Her mother, who always has her hair, nails and make-up impeccably done even when going fishing, has gone to beauty school in her youth. (MB: 11, 31, 34, 59, 185.)

In their effort to assimilate, they both rebel against the values of the past, as the parent-generation in immigrant novels usually does (Atwood 1972: 149), and have renounced Haisla spiritual beliefs, which results in conflicts with Ma-ma-oo. One of them in particular startles Lisamarie as a little girl when her father, during Christmas dinner, tells Jimmy's favourite story about 'B'gwus, the wild man of the woods' (MB: 7). In Al's narration, the story becomes a violent horror story with sound effects, ending with chasing the children around with a sasquatch mask on, but unlike the children, Ma-ma-oo does not find this funny:

> 'You're telling it wrong,' Ma-ma-oo had said […]. Every time Dad launched into his version, she punctuated his gory descriptions with, 'That's not how it happened.'
> 'Oh, Mother,' he protested finally. 'It's just a story.'
> Her lips were pressed together until they were bloodless. She'd left a few minutes later. (MB: 8.)

This scene of a seemingly minor family argument draws attention to the hybridity of the contemporary Haisla culture, as at the Christmas dinner table of the Hill family the disagreement between two generations also becomes a meeting of two worlds (Bhabha 1992: 141). In Ma-ma-oo's view the old stories are not merely invented to entertain but encode proper behaviour and are even considered historical records that are meant to

instruct children,[22] whereas her son, who has given up on Haisla traditions and celebrates Christian feasts like Christmas, turns the old stories into jokes.

The figure of the b'gwus thus becomes a question of belief, an embodiment of the collision of knowledges in the hybrid Haisla community, and the children, Lisamarie remembers, liked their Dad's version of the story better. Jimmy even 'took the story as if it were from the Bible,' convinced that the b'gwus existed (MB: 9). This highlights Robinson's commentary on the uneven evaluation of spiritual beliefs in colonial Canadian society, as in fact one of the reasons Indigenous cultures were thought to be inferior to 'civilized' European cultures was their orality: in addition to not being considered literature, oral tales were certainly not perceived as historical records or as reflecting spiritual beliefs comparable to Christianity, but as pagan myths infused with savagery, an antithesis to European literacy and Christianity (New 1997: 34, 54; Chamberlin 2000: 132–133; Van Toorn 2004: 24–25). Here and elsewhere in the novel, Robinson's juxtaposition of Haisla orature and Christianity forces the reader to recognize that one cannot be thought of as any truer than the other, as Atwood also suggests in *Surfacing*, where the atheist protagonist, having denounced Christianity as well as logic, turns to Indigenous mythology for a source of empowerment (Atwood 1979: 139–140). The collision between Christianity and Haisla knowledge becomes another facet of the questioning of truths in *Monkey Beach*, but as in the case of the family dispute discussed above, Robinson leaves much to the interpretation of the reader, portraying the protagonist as too young and naïve to understand what the disagreements are about.

In fact, in their discussions of 'the unspeakable' in *Monkey Beach*, Castricano (2006: 802) and Dobson (2009: 61–64) argue that in such events, culturally relevant historical facts are usually left unspoken. Castricano (2006: 802) maintains that in Robinson's narrative the unspeakable – that which is barred from the consciousness – consists of the manifold consequences of colonization on the Haisla community, and historical events remain unspoken as the characters try to suppress memories of oppression.

[22] See, for example, Van Toorn (2004: 25) for the functions of orature.

Dobson (2009: 61–62) argues that this kind of ambiguity is part of Robinson's 'calculated tactic' to remove cultural specificity in order to avoid giving the reader a full understanding of Haisla life, and therefore the critique of colonialism is 'surprisingly muted' in the novel (Dobson 2009: 63). Bhabha (1992: 146–147), on the other hand, maintains that structuring the narrative around these kinds of silences is typical of unhomely postcolonial fiction, which uses 'psychic uncertainty' and 'aesthetic distancing', in addition to venturing into the world of the subliminal, as literary mediums. Moreover he (1992: 147) suggests that the responsibility of recovering these silences is the task of the critic; a task which I attempt to perform in my analyses. In my reading of *Monkey Beach*, then, 'the unspeakable' refers to the many discussions about the effects of colonization on the Haisla, the oppression of Indigenous populations in Canada, as well as the violence within the Haisla community, all of which end in silences.

This is especially true of the children's experiences in residential school, which are never discussed explicitly. For instance, as Uncle Mick gets into a fight with Uncle Geordie and Aunt Edith, devout Christians, the young protagonist overhears the argument which is silenced abruptly by her mother, prohibiting the girl from hearing details about the colonial past:

> 'You look at your precious church. You look at what they did. You never went to residential school. You can't tell me what I fucking went through and what I didn't.'
> 'I wasn't telling you anything!' Aunt Edith said. 'I was saying grace.'
> 'You don't get it. […] You're buying into a religion that thought the best way to make us white was to fucking torture children –' (MB: 109–110.)

As the personal effects of colonialism unfold in the passage, the traumatic experiences of Indigenous children in residential schools are hinted at, but not revealed. In this instance of 'uncertain colonial silence' (Bhabha 1994: 124), however, the colonized return to question colonial authority, and it is left for the reader to infer what kind of torture Mick is referring to. As Bhabha (1994: 124, 128) maintains in his discussion of colonial hybridity, it is impossible for the non-Haisla reader to fully understand or translate the experience, even if one knows that the residential school system subjected

the Indigenous children in Canada to malnutrition, sexual abuse and illness due to insufficient clothing and medical care, in addition to separating them from their families and forcing them to work for their upkeep although education was compulsory for children under 16 (see e.g. Miller 2011).

However, resisting an 'idealized' portrayal of her Indigenous characters (see Sugars 2004b: 82; Dobson 2009: 63), Robinson uses the same techniques of aesthetic distancing and obscurity in describing the violence within the community. Uncle Josh's sexual abuse of the children of his family and friends, although hinted at throughout the novel (MB: 58, 68, 207, 319), only becomes more apparent as Lisamarie reveals having discovered Karaoke's letter to him towards the end of the novel (MB: 365).[23] Characters such as Josh and Lisamarie's grandparents show that the Haisla are not simply the stereotypes of imperial discourse, neither violent barbarians nor noble savages (Atwood 1972: 109), but complex characters whose lives have been affected by the imposition of European cultural influences and colonialism. However, the extended family of Lisamarie's youth is also shown to have positive qualities to it. Despite their disputes, the family members in *Monkey Beach* remain loyal to one another, in a manner which suggests the kind of 'group preservation' that, according to Atwood (1972: 132), characterizes Canadian literary families. As Lisamarie learns to distinguish and pick berry shoots, make oolichan grease and a soapberry dish, and to smoke sock-eye the traditional Haisla way together with her grandmother, parents and other relatives (MB: 73, 76–77, 85–87, 148–149), Robinson records Haisla cultural heritage in the form of culinary traditions while also celebrating the extended family as a support network where the sharing of resources is still a common practice (MB: 73, 76, 148).

Yet Robinson also makes visible the consequences of colonization onto the Haisla form of organizing their society by showing how, after the imposition of European culture, laws and institutions, this system has begun to be eroded, in part because of the erosion of the oral teaching tradition which was one of the key functions of the extended

[23] The same letter also implies that Josh himself has been abused by a priest in residential school, but this incident is never discussed further in the novel. However, Robinson seems to suggest that the victims of colonization pass on the trauma onto other members of their community one way or another.

families (Henderson 2000a: 266). As the only one in the children-generation to get the alternative education in Haisla history and knowledge, in old customs and spiritual beliefs, Lisamarie is an outsider among her peers and is forced to balance between two cultures in order to survive spiritually. In *Monkey Beach*, then, the trap in which the characters are caught is not so much their family, but the society in which they live and the values they have internalized. As the family history of the Hills unfolds, it becomes clear that the Haisla community of *Monkey Beach* has begun to suffer from what Atwood (1972: 209–210) labels the Rapunzel Syndrome: they have internalized imperial discourse, which suggests that their own culture is inferior to that brought over from Europe by the settlers, and silently succumb to the official truths of the neo-colonial society they live in. Even Ma-ma-oo concludes that the time of traditional beliefs and medicine is in the past because 'old ways don't matter much now' when telling her granddaughter about the legacy of shamanism in Lisamarie's mother's family (MB: 152–154). For the adolescent protagonist, the unpopulated wilderness becomes a refuge away from her oppressed community, but also a space imprinted with unspoken evidence of the colonial history of her people, as I suggest in the following section, which analyses the ways in which Robinson challenges the familiar images of the Canadian wilderness in her novel.

4.2 The Canadian wilderness as home

As I already argued in chapter two, the depictions of the Canadian landscape that Atwood studied in *Survival* rest heavily on literary tropes of imperial discourse, with the analysis focusing on the settler imaginary that deemed the Canadian wilderness monstrous and generally untrustworthy because different from Europe (Atwood 1972: 49). These images, having nevertheless become Canadian literary and cultural codes, are being increasingly placed under revision especially in works by writers from minority groups, including women authors (New 1997: 114, 118, 166; Brown 2001), exactly as Atwood (1972: 238, 241–242, 246) advises Canadian authors to do if they wish to shed their colonial mentality. In her own wilderness quest, Atwood (1979) suggests that change is possible, offering a diverse view of the Canadian land. In the

beginning of *Surfacing*, familiar wilderness images prevail, as the protagonist returns to the Quebec bushes of her childhood in order to look for her missing father. Here, the settled wilderness has already turned into a commodity, having been rearranged and reordered in order to be economically useful and under control, a role which the settlers saw as their task in the new world (Atwood 1972: 120–122; New 1997: 73–74). Instead of being empty, the Quebec bush is filled with 'Americans' – people surveying the remaining areas for purposes of industries, the military and commerce, as well as people riding huge power boats, polluting the lake while killing its animals for recreation (e.g. Atwood 1979: 60–61, 87–90, 107, 109–110, 143). With its strong 'city/non-city binary' (New 1997: 125), *Surfacing* fits the pattern of Canadian fiction that associates the city with both progress and corruption while considering the 'non-city' as the embodiment of old-fashioned ways of life and values (see Atwood 1979: 28–29, 45, 53, 67, 157).

Thus the wilderness of *Surfacing*, in a manner typical of settler writing (see Atwood 1972; New 1997: 74), is a mental and physical challenge; a slightly threatening and definitely un-answering space where the possibilities of starvation after getting lost or losing one's mind because of isolation are ever-present in the mind of the nameless protagonist, the only one in the party of four who is familiar with the bush (e.g. Atwood 1979: 25–26, 40–43, 54, 95). However, as she sees the changes that have taken place in her childhood environment during the groups' fishing trips on the lake, and realizes that the 'anonymous water and unclaimed land' of Canada was neither empty to begin with nor without history, she begins to '[feel] a sickening sense of complicity' (Atwood 1979: 104, 120, 124). Her settler guilt turns into a desire for Indigenous authenticity, exactly as Lawson (2004: 156–157) suggests, and the narrator's view of the wilderness begins to change. While Robinson also portrays a controlled wilderness as she rewrites 'the lush and impenetrable British Columbia rain forests' (Atwood 1972: 96) from the perspective of an Indigenous female character, the narrator feels no sense of complicity in the deterioration of the Haisla lands. The cause of changes in the wilderness are others rather than the Haisla: referring to a forestry camp built on one of the places where she went to catch crabs with Uncle Mick in her childhood, she notes that '[t]hey built their base over one of the best crab beds on the channel' (MB: 95). While it is never specified who 'they' are, it is clear they are not familiar with the British Columbia

rainforests in the same way as the narrator and her people. For the Haisla, the wilderness is not ‘unanswering’ (Atwood 1972: 49): the animals of their country act as guides and are treated as friends and neighbours, while the whole Haisla territory is filled with stories and the history of her people with its abandoned villages and old graveyards Lisamarie passes on her way to Monkey Beach (e.g. MB: 82, 110–118, 122–125, 192–194, 352–353), as Robinson celebrates the age-old connection her people have to the British Columbia environment.

During her frequent trips to the wilderness in her childhood, Lisamarie learns orature recording survival skills and ecological knowledge, such as how to find and prepare oolichans, once an important part of the Haisla diet and one of their main trading goods, and where to find edible plants (MB: 73, 76–77, 114, 192). Some oral stories about Kitamaat and its people express spiritual beliefs by describing a distant past when the people and the animals could still talk to one another, and record how the Haisla lands took their forms as well as where different place names derive from (MB: 89, 154, 161, 210, 276). These stories link the Haisla firmly to their environment and show how, as Edward Chamberlin (2000: 127) maintains, the people are possessed by the place rather than vice versa; their culture is affected and defined by the environment in which they live. However, as Ma-ma-oo tells Lisamarie, ‘to really understand the old stories, you [have] to speak Haisla’ (MB: 211), and the loss of language becomes yet another way in which colonization continues to affect the cultural heritage of Lisamarie’s community. However, it is not only a loss that affects the survival of orature, but also threatens the Haisla way of life, recorded in the language. For instance, as Lisamarie learns from Ma-ma-oo, for the Haisla, accustomed to their environment, there are many kinds of blueberries:

> ‘Look,’ she said, coming up to a bush. ‘See these ones? *Pipxs’m*.’
> ‘That’s what you call blueberries in Haisla?’
> ‘No, no, just these blueberries. See, they have white stuff on them. *Pipxs’m* means “berries with mould on them.”’ […] I had never noticed that there were different types of blueberry bushes. (MB: 159-160.)

The use of Haisla words for plants used for medicinal purposes and food, as in the case of the paragraph quoted above, underlines the fact that Haisla culture has developed in

connection to the environment. Moreover, the above example suggests that the loss of a language can erase other kinds of cultural knowledge, as language affects perception (c.f. Chamberlin 2000: 127, 131, 133; Henderson 2000a: 264), while furthermore implying that English is not as well equipped to describe the environment.

In fact, Robinson also suggests that the inauthenticity of the European connection to Canadian land is recorded in language, as Atwood (1972: 62) and Ashcroft et al. (1989: 135–137, 140–141) have noted. The narrator of *Monkey Beach* consistently refers to places as well as local plants and animals in Haisla, suggesting that unlike the local languages that have developed in accordance with, and adapted to, the British Columbia wilderness, English is insufficient in describing the environment. Furthermore, Robinson shows how the traditional ecological knowledge of the Haisla loses its meaning when, because of pollution, overuse of resources, and forestry, the oolichans and other species once important to the Haisla diet and cultural heritage are no longer available (MB: 92–93, 95, 192). In fact, Henderson (2000a) argues, for the Indigenous peoples of Canada, the question of cultural survival is intertwined with both linguistic and ecological preservation, and this becomes evident in *Monkey Beach*. The numerous abandoned villages, no longer serving as winter camps or hunting and fishing camps, with their decrepit houses falling apart (e.g. MB: 92–93, 150, 192, 215) suggest that the traditional Haisla are the ‘vanishing race’ of imperial discourse (c.f. Atwood 1972: 95–96; Lawson 2004: 156–157).

However, this is yet another unspeakable subject in the community, as the protagonist learns at a young age when asking about something she has seen in the forest during a fishing trip with her mother and Uncle Mick:

> ‘Is there a village there?’
> Mom shook her head. ‘Used to be.’
> ‘What happened?’
> She looked down at me. ‘Most of the people died.’
> ‘How?’
> ‘They just died,’ she said, her lips thinning. (MB: 100.)

Whether the reason for the death of the people who once lived in the 'abandoned and decaying' (Atwood 1972: 96) village that Lisamarie sees in the forest were the Contact epidemics[24] or the fact that the Haisla way of life has rapidly changed as a result of assimilation policies and ecological degradation, for the Haisla of *Monkey Beach*, these consequences of European invasion are an unspeakable, horrifying subject best barred from the consciousness. Nevertheless, the uninhabited houses falling apart in the wilderness serve as an unhomely remainder of colonization, representing the 'deeper historical displacements' that Bhabha (1992: 147) discusses in connection to the unhomely houses of fiction, and the young narrator can sense this when entering one of the houses on this old fishing camp. The house, 'deliciously old' and definitely one that 'had to be haunted' according to the young protagonist greets her with a sense of 'heaviness' upon entering, and Lisamarie hears a laughter echoing 'from somewhere past the house, in the trees' (MB: 101). The narrator's capability of sensing the history of her people, of hearing and seeing ghosts where there once used to be life, makes the British Columbia wilderness an unhomely experience to her and the reader.

Hence, Robinson implies, the Haisla and the wilderness are, if not 'destroyed by the intrusion of a technologically "superior" race whose values […] are unsuited to the land' like the vanishing race of Atwood (1972: 96), at least severely affected by it. In *Surfacing*, where the commodification and destruction of wilderness as well as its original inhabitants are also in evidence, as I argued above, the narrator start to identify with nature as victim, as suggested in *Survival*:

> A curious thing starts happening in Canadian literature once man starts winning [...]. Sympathy begins to shift from the victorious hero towards the defeated giantess, and the problem is no longer how to avoid being swallowed up by a cannibalistic Nature but how to avoid destroying her. (Atwood 1972: 60.)

After having a vision of her past while diving below the surface of a lake, the narrator of *Surfacing* renounces everything making her complicit – the city as present, 'the

[24] The term refers to the epidemic diseases, such as tuberculosis, smallpox and influenza, brought to North America by explorers and settlers. In British Columbia, they began in the 1770s and had killed as much as 90 per cent of the population by the 1890s (Ames and Suttles 1997: 262–263).

Americans,' and even language as 'the English words seemed foreign' (e.g. Atwood 1979: 134–139, 144, 148, 162) – hence exemplifying the 'internal conflict' in settler writing Slemon (2004: 148) speaks of. She directs resistance inwards, at herself (c.f. Slemon 2004: 148) when she realizes that like her parents, she was and is 'an intruder' (Atwood 1979: 180). Her mimicry of the Empire then turns into a desire for Indigenous authority (c.f. Lawson 2004: 154–157), as she finds solace in Indigenous spirituality and consequently resorts to living as part of nature, giving up everything man-made, eating berries and sleeping naked on the ground (Atwood: 1979: 139–140, 169–176).

Robinson's wilderness, on the other hand, is not the defeated giantess of Atwood's narrative, even if one of Lisamarie's dream-visions might be read as suggestive of that:

> When I dreamed, I could see things in double exposure – the real world, and beyond it, the same world, but whole, with no clear-cuts, no pollution, no boats, no cars, no planes. Whales rolled in and out of the water, and not just orcas either. […] Later, in the spring, the beaches were white with herring eggs. Oolichans came next, filling the rivers so full […] I was sure I could cross it and not get my feet wet. (MB: 265–266.)

Thus Robinson contrasts the neo-colonial present with the past, but rather than reading the above paragraph as the kind of romantic nostalgia for the past that Bhabha (1994: 9) cautions against, I consider it to function as a way of emphasizing that the cultural survival of the Haisla, in the case of both orature and traditional ecological knowledge, is dependent on ecological preservation and restoration. However, instead of mourning the changes that have occurred under colonialism, *Monkey Beach* implies that the unsuitable values and superior technology of the European arrivals are not able to compete with Indigenous knowledge and technologies, or the forces of nature. As Lisamarie sets on her trip from Kitamaat to Namu in search of her brother, she opts for the familiar Haisla boating route because it would take days to get to her destination by buses or airplanes, while the boat-ride only takes a few hours if one knows the way (MB: 136–137, 215). During winter storms, the roads in northern British Columbia are slippery and cut by fallen trees, and boating accidents due to sudden storms are frequent in any season even in the case of experienced boat-handlers like Uncle Mick (MB: 123, 144, 161–162, 286).

Yet, rather than suggesting that nature is the monster of settler writing, Robinson portrays it as powerful and able to adapt – as the kind of 'living process which includes opposites: life and death, "gentleness" and "hostility"' – that Atwood (1972: 63) suggests the Canadian wilderness would be like if only authors were able to describe it neutrally, without the imperial tropes and the sense of alienation that characterized settler writing. Indigenous worldviews in fact represented nature as an ever-changing process of which humans are but a small part, and in which every part depends on the other (Henderson 2000a). While Lisamarie is taught to respect everything in the wilderness (e.g. MB: 98–99, 110–112, 114–115, 150–154), she also learns to see her place as a human in it: describing an old graveyard in the forest where whole families have been buried 'in the time of the great dying,' the narrator makes a point of noting that the best blueberries grow on the graves (MB: 82). Humans, then, are one part of nature that offers both death and life, and in both novels discussed here, the wilderness finally becomes a source of consolation and empowerment as the protagonists come to understand this. For the narrator of *Surfacing*, the wilderness is a space in which she can forgive herself past mistakes, feel a connection to her diseased mother and father, and finally let go of her settler guilt (Atwood 1979: 170–171, 175–176, 180–183, 185). For Lisamarie, the wilderness serves similar purposes: when Uncle Mick dies in a boating accident which she could perhaps have prevented, the grieving teenager begins to feel increasingly like an outsider in her community, getting into fights with her peers and in trouble at school, and the wilderness with its forgotten cemeteries, foraging possibilities and peacefulness becomes her refuge, a space in which she can feel a connection to her past (MB: 140, 147–148, 150–154, 159–160, 165–177). Moreover, upon returning to Kitamaat after her brief escape to Vancouver in the wake of her Ma-ma-oo's accidental death, it is the wilderness Lisamarie embraces as home, exclaiming that, being in the city, she had forgotten how beautiful it was (MB: 296, 325, 335).

Thus, as New (1997: 117, 120, 123, 126–127) suggests is typical of contemporary Canadian writing, it is the wilderness, rather than houses, that comes to be seen as home in both novels discussed in the present chapter – a place of belonging for which they feel homesickness, the 'here' whose value the protagonists understand only after having gone away. However, the authors challenge 'the dominant image of home' in Canadian

writing, that of the Ontario wilderness as a space of Euro-Canadian male heroism and history (New 1997: 120) by setting their wilderness quests in remote, less familiar parts of Canada, and describing the Quebec bush or the British Columbia rainforests as spaces full of history, both personal and political, as well as depicting them as homes. As a home, the Canadian wilderness nevertheless resembles Bhabha's descriptions of an unhomely (post)colonial one, haunted not only by the ghosts the characters see on the beaches and hear in the trees (Atwood 1979: 166–176, 180–181; MB: 91, 101, 289–291, 331–332) but by history, as I suggested above. This discussion continues in the following section, which concentrates on how the Canadian theme of exploration is treated by the two women novelists who are the focus of the present chapter.

4.3 The wilderness quest as a failed exploration

The figure of the explorer, travelling through the unknown and unwelcoming Canadian bush, charting new territories or on a quest to find something specific such as the North West Passage, has become an archetypal hero in Canadian culture (Atwood 1972: 113–114; New 1997: 73–74). As novels centring on a wilderness quest for a missing family member, both *Monkey Beach* and *Surfacing* engage in a dialogue with Canadian fiction that has utilized the exploration motif as a way of looking for roots and reconsidering local history (see Atwood 1972: 112–114). At the same time they rewrite the conventions of the genre, especially by viewing the wilderness, traditionally considered a test of manliness and a space of male heroism (Atwood 1972: 113–114; New 1997: 73–74, 79, 80, 104), from the perspective of young female characters. As my analysis will show, both novels utilize maps to show that the seemingly objective practices of charting the ‘new’ world and of map-making are in fact political acts inscribing power. Early on in *Monkey Beach*, Robinson surveys the maps of British Columbia, and instructs the reader on how to find Lisamarie’s hometown Kitamaat in the midst of locales named after Western historical figures:

> Beneath Alaska, find the Queen Charlotte Islands. [...] To get to Kitamaat, run your finger northeast, right up to the Douglas Channel [...]. You should pass Gil Island, Princess Royal Island, Gribbell Island,

> Hawkesbury Island, Maitland Island and finally Costi Island. Near the head of the Douglas, you'll find Kitamaat Village. (MB: 4–5)

Robinson's map of the north-west coast underlines the inscription of power involved in mapping: the colonizer has assumed the right of naming and claiming territories as his own instead of using the names already in existence because of their assumed authority over the people they perceived as primitive (c.f New 1997: 24–25, 28, 37–38, 54–55).

As New (1997: 28) notes, naming affects perception, especially in relation to ownership and power-relations, and here it suggests that the imperial power and history have the authority to define even contemporary Canada. The name of Lisamarie's hometown, however, is revealed as dubiously reflecting local Indigenous history:

> Early in the nineteenth century, Hudson's Bay traders used Tsimshian guides to show them around, which is when the names began to get confusing. 'Kitamaat' is a Tsimshian word that means people of the falling snow, and that was their name for the main Haisla village. […] The name got stuck on the official records […], even though it really should be called Haisla. (MB: 4–5.)

Due to a misunderstanding between the European map-makers and their Indigenous guides, the main Haisla village is named inaccurately, as the colonizer has assumed the power of re-naming locations that historically have belonged to the Haisla. Robinson, however, consistently refers to places as well as local plants and animals in their Haisla names, a convention that can be associated with the project of recording cultural heritage that theorists such as Battiste (2000) emphasize as an important part of Indigenous postcolonialism. Yet in her 1970s exploration novel Atwood also points out the inaccuracy of maps and the transactions of power that are related to the practice of naming. As the nameless protagonist of *Surfacing* re-enters her childhood 'home ground' of northern Quebec, she soon realizes everything has changed since her last visit, and is forced ask for directions as construction in the name of progress is taking place everywhere (Atwood 1979: 6–8). Later, looking at her father's maps of the district, trying to decipher what the locations on the lake shores which he has marked with x's mean, she is faced with names changed and changing, from English to the French of the surrounding villages, and the fact that the maps of the lakes are

inaccurate: what once was a shoreline, is now under water as the lake-level has been raised by the power plants built around it (Atwood 1979: 120–121, 127).

Hence both authors, as feminist writers have often done, come to challenge and reject what New (1997: 114) calls 'the map-making metaphor' – the idea of the conquest of a static object, as the heroic explorers penetrate the hostile land, naming and claiming it as their property – by having their female protagonists, who know their environment and thus have no use for maps or the names in them, travel the familiar but ever-changing wilderness; not *against* it but *in* it. Both Atwood and Robinson send their protagonists to champion water, writing the lakes and the sea, the '"Romantic" locales' of Canadian exploration narratives (Atwood 1972: 114), as the unknown that their characters enter. Moreover, both of these wilderness quests centre on the notion of finding, fitting the pattern of exploration narratives of the New World (New 1997: 24). While not searching for new territories but missing family members, the narrators of *Monkey Beach* and *Surfacing* realize they need to look below the surface, in the hidden and unexplored realms of the seas and the lakes (Atwood 1979: 127; MB: 1, 370). While declaring that 'no one has actually set foot on the deepest ocean floor' (MB: 125), Lisamarie nevertheless listens to the crows she hears speaking to her in the opening scene of the novel, and she enters the waters at Monkey Beach, where she has seen her brother in a dream. It is there that the novel turns into a vision quest (MB: 6–7, 17, 367–370), exactly like *Surfacing*.

As the motif of looking below the surface suggests, both novels turn into explorations of the self, as Atwood (1972: 112–115) argues Canadian exploration narratives, usually written for the purpose of searching for history and roots, tend to do. The narratives may be viewed as typical failed explorations (c.f. Atwood 1972: 115), finding nothing concrete as neither narrator is able to firmly locate the people they are searching for, and in fact the endings of *Surfacing* and *Monkey Beach* have often been read as inconclusive. In both novels, 'process becomes more important than end,' which Robert Kroetsch (2004: 65) – in an observation similar to Atwood's (1972) idea of mere survival as the key theme of Canadian writing – claims to be typical of Canadian fiction, which leans towards open endings rather than victorious conclusions. Kroetsch

(2004: 68) notes that in *Surfacing*, Atwood 'locates [the Canadian] story by not finding it,' referring to the ending, where the protagonist has, depending on the reading, either suffered a mental breakdown or had a vision that enabled her to make peace with her past, and is now, perhaps, on her way back to the city, with her future as unresolved as her present (Atwood 1979: 185–186). The ending of *Monkey Beach*, as Kit Dobson (2009: 65) points out, is similarly ambiguous: Jimmy is not found, although Lisamarie has a vision of him murdering Josh on board and both of them falling in the ocean in a storm (MB: 369–370).

The interpretation of both novels thus depends on whether one allows the possibility of the existence of other forms of knowledge than the Western scientific one, as Castricano (2006: 802) maintains *Monkey Beach* demands the reader to do. The Anglo-Canadian protagonist of *Surfacing*, attempting to come to terms with her personal past as well as her settler-invader heritage, desiring Indigenous authenticity with respect to land, resorts to considering the Indigenous populations, 'the first explorers' (Atwood 1979: 120, 139–140), as her spiritual ancestors exactly as Atwood (1972: 124) and Lawson (2004: 157) propose. While she is firmly convinced that visiting an Indigenous sacred place, indicated to her by the maps her father has left behind, has enabled her to connect with Indigenous 'gods' and talk to the dead (Atwood 1979: 139–140, 166–170, 172, 176, 180–181), *Monkey Beach* depicts an Indigenous character who, even though shamanism is supposed to have passed down through the generations in her family, is in doubt of her spiritual inheritance (MB: 17, 154, 194). Lisamarie's struggle to understand and appreciate Haisla shamanism becomes the unknown to be explored in the novel, as she hesitates to acknowledge this unhomely kind of knowledge, hidden and unspoken in the community. For her, there is no recoverable, authentic Indigenous past, and by representing her Indigenous protagonist as someone who is caught between two cultures, Robinson effectively denies the settler society the possibility of acting as if the invasion never happened (c.f. Lawson 2004: 157).

The b'gwus, sighted by Lisamarie twice in the course of her life (MB: 15–16, 315), becomes a symbol of the Indigenous populations. His story reflects the imperial narrative of the supposed fate of the Indigenous savage, the vanishing race:

> There are rumours that they killed themselves off, fighting over some unfathomable cause. Other reports say they starved to death near the turn of the century, after a decade of horrific winters. A variation of this rumour says that they were infected with TB and smallpox [...]. They are no longer sighted, no longer make dashes into villages to carry off women and children. (MB: 318)

In settler society, the b'gwus has become nothing but an advertisement gimmick, a famous figure in popular culture texts, appropriated for the purposes of marketing (MB: 317), while the real b'gwus, the Other of Haisla stories, will cease to exist if orature is forgotten altogether (MB: 210–211). Robinson, however, insists on his continued existence: 'At night, very late and in remote parts of British Columbia [...] you sometimes hear him. His howl is not like a wolf's and not like a human's, but something in between' (MB: 318). Like the Haisla community of her novel, Robinson suggests, the b'gwus has been hybridized in the colonial Canadian society; although in danger of disappearing, he is still there, implying the possibilities of re-learning and the restoration of knowledge. It is in this sense, I believe, that the protagonist of *Monkey Beach* is connected to the b'gwus: in addition to signifying a connection to the past, the figure of the b'gwus implies a promise of a future free of internalized victimization.

When Lisamarie and Jimmy, as children, go camping at Monkey Beach, Lisamarie experiences her first encounter with a b'gwus (MB: 15–16). However, she tells no one about her sighting: 'I cringed when I imagined myself telling people I'd seen a b'gwus. They'd snicker about it the way they did when Ma-ma-oo insisted they were real' (MB: 17). At just the moment that the protagonist spots the b'gwus, a raven flies above her head, croaking in the sky (MB: 16). The trickster, representing the powers of transformation (Henderson 2000b: 73), signifies a change in Lisamarie, as soon after this she begins to see visions of the little tree spirit announcing disasters as well as to hear ghosts speaking and laughing in her vicinity (MB: 18–19, 21–22, 30–31, 91, 101). Many years later, when returning to Kitamaat from Vancouver, Lisamarie encounters the b'gwus yet again while driving her friend's car at night. Instead of doubting herself this time, she acknowledges that she 'felt deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world' (MB: 315–316). Like all of her encounters with the

supernatural, this incident represents a turning point in the narrator's life, as implied by the story of Weegit the Raven embedded in the narrative just before the scene where Lisamarie finally affirms Indigenous knowledge as something familiar and comforting (MB: 295–296, 316). The trickster, the story insists, is not dead as some believe,[25] but only retired, and, having 'become respectable [...] only his small, sly smile reveals how much he enjoys pulling the wool over everyone else's eyes' (MB: 295–296). At the moment she meets the b'gwus for the second time, and embraces an encounter with a magical thing without doubt, it is Lisamarie who becomes the trickster for her people, suggesting positive changes: she is able to rise above the cycle of victimization, letting go of the imposed idea of the inferiority of her cultural heritage. After this, she becomes the teacher of tradition to her brother and friends, instructing them in spiritual beliefs, wilderness skills and ecological knowledge (MB: 313, 343–354).

In the beginning of *Monkey Beach*, the reader encounters a protagonist willing to believe traditional knowledge, who nevertheless doubts her own abilities: 'I used to think that if I could just talk to the spirit world, I'd get some answers. Ha bloody ha' (MB: 17). In the fourth and last section of the novel, Lisamarie is finally able to negotiate between the past and the present, acknowledge her heritage of repressed knowledge, and contact the dead. Venturing into the spirit world by donating the hungry spirits her own blood, she is able to find out what happened to her brother, unlike the Coast Guard, who, despite their radios and radars, have not figured out what happened to *The Queen of the North*. In her vision, she also finds a reassuring connection to her personal history in the land of the dead, meeting again with her beloved brother, Uncle Mick, Ma-ma-oo, and her grandfather, as well as being able to fully understand the Haisla language for the first time in her life. (MB: 5–6, 135–136, 365, 367–274.) In the end, Ma-ma-oo and Jimmy come to her aid, helping her recover from her vision and return to Monkey Beach (MB: 371, 372–373), where, in the final scene of the novel, the protagonist is lying on the sand:

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[25] Some orature insists the Trickster decided to disappear and abandon the Indigenous populations of North America upon the arrival of the Europeans (Sugars 2004b: 25–26n).

> Somewhere above my head, a raven grumbles as it hops between the branches of the tightly packed trees. [...] I am no longer cold. I am so light I could just drift away. Close, very close, a b'wus howls – not quite human, not quite wolf, but something in between. [...] In the distance, I hear the sound of a speed boat. (MB: 374.)

The reader, as many critics have noted (see e.g. Appleford 2005: 87; Dobson 2009: 65) is left in uncertainty about Lisamarie's survival, although hearing a speed boat represents a chance. However, in my reading of the novel, it is the howl of the b'gwus that Lisamarie hears which finally suggests survival, meaning moreover that *Monkey Beach* rewrites the Canadian theme of survival without victory.

Atwood (1972: 114) connects the recurrent Canadian theme of exploration to 'the "Where is here?" dilemma'; suggesting, in other words, that exploration narratives enable the authors to give shape to their experience of their country. In the novels I am discussing, exploration seems to have failed in the traditional sense of not being able to find anything concrete, but in the end both narrators are nevertheless able to locate themselves firmly, stating 'I'm *here*' (Atwood 1979: 166; MB: 294; emphasis mine). Furthermore, both have been able to recover repressed history, which will allow them to break the cycle of victimization; finally free from her settler guilt and internal conflict, the protagonist of *Surfacing* does have something besides the fact of her survival, as she arrives to an often-quoted realization: 'This above all, to refuse to be a victim' (Atwood 1979: 185). At the moment that Lisamarie attempts to contact the dead for the first time, she too refuses to be a victim of history, as the unhomely final section of *Monkey Beach* stages the return of repressed but now un-forgotten knowledge. Despite the uncertain fact of her survival, Lisamarie and the novel end in victory: having had the courage to try to contact the dead and been able to do that, Lisamarie restores faith in unspeakable Indigenous knowledge, challenging imported worldviews and our Western scientific knowledge of the world. Despite the sound of a speed boat, the b'gwus still howls – and Lisamarie, somewhere in-between different worlds, can hear it.

5. MENNONITE UNHOMELINESS IN MIRIAM TOEWS'S *A COMPLICATED KINDNESS*

In *A Complicated Kindness*, Miriam Toews approaches the idea of Canada as a home from a point-of-view that transgresses the positions of the settler and the diasporic immigrant by depicting the experience of living in rural Canada through her Mennonite first-person narrator Nomi Nickel. Her narrative, like that of Lisamarie in *Monkey Beach*, shows that Canada as a nation is a space where the master narrative of history comes to be contested as the repressed memories of those in the minority enter public discourse. At the same time, the novel gives voice to the Mennonite women who are traditionally silenced in the religious Mennonite communities (see Brandt 1993: 136). The Mennonite critic and poet Di Brandt (1993: 136–137) argues in *Wild Mother Dancing* that since traditional Mennonite culture allowed little 'artistic individuality,' the flowering of Mennonite art in Canada since the 1980s has been the result of artists breaking away from their suppressive communities, and, perhaps as an effect of the suppression of artistic individuality noted by Brandt (1993: 136–137), Douglas Reimer (2002: 7–17) notes that creating protagonists who feel extreme alienation in their communities is typical of recent Mennonite fiction. In this respect, the character of Nomi Nickel represents the colonial and Mennonite artist in search of her voice, reflecting the kind of alienation and placelessness that Atwood (1972) associated with Canadian settler figures as well as colonial artists. However, for Nomi, the feelings of non-belonging and unhomeliness in Canada are also a consequence of cultural hybrity as the immigrant, exactly like the Indigenous Lisamarie in *Monkey Beach*, is forced to negotiate ideas of home and belonging in-between the minority and majority cultures.

The narrative voice of sixteen-year-old Nomi has been marvelled at by critics for convincingly combining the comical naivety, blunt honesty and sense of despair of a teenager faced with the terrible loss of her mother and the subsequent questioning of the religious principles that she has structured her sense of self around (see e.g. Weich 2004, Brandt 2005, Grandy 2010). The character of Nomi has been compared to Holden Caulfield, the first person narrator of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (Bergman 2004), which incidentally is a novel that Nomi was forbidden to write an essay about at

school, and which is set in the city of New York where Nomi longs to live (CK: 5, 53, 135, 152). Despite its frequent references to American literature and popular culture (e.g. CK: 9, 12, 23, 27), the novel tells a story with a typically Canadian theme; that of 'a gifted young person who feels stifled by his or her small rural community and lights out for the freedom and opportunity offered by the city' (Brandt 2005: 21; see also Kroetsch 2004: 64), exactly like Del, the narrator of Alice Munro's 1971 novel *Lives of Girls and Women*.[26] However, as both Brandt (2005: 21) and Margaret Steffler (2009: 125–126) point out, Toews rewrites this familiar Canadian story by creating a character unable to leave even when abandoned by others.

Lives of Girls and Women is in fact one of the things that Nomi's sister Tash has left behind when escaping their hometown (CK: 71), and in the course of the story East Village, like Munro's Jubilee, is seen through the eyes of a teenage girl whose narrative concentrates on the experiences of its female inhabitants. However, unlike in the case of Del Jordan, whose mother foresees 'a change coming […] in the lives of girls and women' and encourages her daughter's intellectual efforts (Munro 2001: 193), there is little promise of emancipation for Nomi. Her rural hometown East Village and its fundamentalist Mennonite community are governed by a group of male elders, who abolish public transportation from the town to prevent people from leaving, resent the non-Mennonite doctor in the local hospital for prescribing birth control to women, and excommunicate people who do not obey their rules (CK: 7, 43–45, 53, 56, 134, 151). In spite of her growing anger towards the patriarchal order of East Village, and her wish to see 'the *real* world' (CK: 6), the protagonist finds herself reluctant to leave behind the town where she nevertheless remembers having had a happy childhood. In addition to not being able to abandon her father, Nomi also quietly entertains the idea of her mother coming back for her, despite understanding it to be unlikely after three years of waiting without a word from her missing parent (CK: 4, 225).

For Nomi the disappearance of her mother means the beginning of a search for truth, and she begins to question her faith and memory, as well as authorities and even

[26] Subsequent references are to the Vintage International edition of 2001.

language. Her quest for truth becomes ‘a linguistic struggle’ (Steffler 2009: 129) that attests to the linguistic alienation of the hybrid narrator, as she searches for the right kind of vocabulary and language to describe herself, the people of her hometown, and the town itself, as if she was struggling with a ‘desire to *name*’ the alien environment that her hometown has become to her (Atwood 1972: 62). As the protagonist slowly discovers the reasons for her mother’s disappearance, she comes to reveal the hypocrisy at the heart of her hometown, as she finds out that Trudie was shunned by her own brother Hans, the leader of the community, ostensibly because of alleged adultery, but obviously also because she refused to be victimized and silenced (CK: 93–94, 119, 162–163, 171–174, 243). Thus, in Toews’s novel, exactly as in Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*, it is not the family that comes to be seen as a trap one needs to escape from (c.f. Atwood 1972: 131), but the community that suppresses knowledge and behaviour deemed inappropriate. However, whereas in *Monkey Beach* readers encounter an Indigenous community for whom the past has become an unspeakable subject as they attempt to repress knowledge of their Haisla cultural heritage as well as the effects of colonization, in *A Complicated Kindness* they are faced with an immigrant community that desperately holds on to the past and their cultural heritage in an effort to create a Utopian home in memory of their European origins (e.g. CK: 48).

Hence the notion of home, which links contemporary Mennonite writing to questions of both settler and immigrant postcolonialism (Kroeker 2003: 239) as I will show in the my analysis below, as well as the feeling of belonging associated with the idea of home, are questioned and shown to be unstable concepts in the novel. The beginning of the novel portrays Nomi’s home as an unhomely space of secrecy that is somehow out of control, and like that of *Monkey Beach*, the opening paragraph suggests that not only the reader but also the narrator is to some extent an unknowing outsider: ‘I live with my father, Ray Nickel, in that low brick bungalow out on highway number twelve. Blue shutters, brown door, one shattered window. Nothing great. The furniture keeps disappearing, though. That keeps things interesting’ (CK: 1). The mention of a broken window and missing furniture helps to create an eerie sense of secrecy, suggestive as it is that the familiar, Nomi’s home, has been disturbed by the emergence of something unexpected. In this sense, the opening paragraph recalls the unhomely moment that

Bhabha (1992: 142–143, 146) considers the beginning of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to be, with its single opening sentence, '124 was spiteful' (Morrison quoted in Bhabha 1992: 146) implying that the story is about to reveal something strange and disturbing. Moreover, as readers are unfamiliar with 'that […] bungalow' or 'highway number twelve' (CK: 1), they are confronted with both the sense that Nomi has a specific narratee, someone who knows more than the average reader, and with the strange world of a Mennonite town in which they remain outsiders.

Although Nomi later reveals the reason for one of the front windows of her house being shattered and solves the mystery of the disappearing furniture (CK: 160, 239–240), the opening paragraph also suggests that the protagonist is an unknowing outsider, as Nomi in fact turns out to have been with regard to the reasons of her sister and mother's disappearance (e.g. CK: 4, 54, 96–97, 189, 243–245). Her subsequent loss of faith and questioning of the patriarchal order of East Village leads the protagonist to willingly set herself in an outsider position in her community, as she considers her hometown to be a place where 'there's no room for in between. You're in or you're out' (CK: 10), with her own excommunication towards the end of the novel seeming to prove her right. However, as Nomi becomes an explorer of East Village, wandering its streets and meeting people whose histories come to form a complex narrative of the Mennonite community, the town and its people are shown to be strange hybrids somewhere in-between the past and the present, with the Mennonite community forming 'a nation unto themselves,' exactly as Canadian Mennonites have historically considered themselves to be (Kroeker 2003: 242).[27] While Nomi maintains that she cannot understand her surreal hometown (e.g. CK: 4, 6, 13), her position is much like that of Del in *Lives of Girls and Women*, who observes that because she is an outsider, she is able to see 'the order, the wholeness, the intricate arrangement of town life' in Jubilee more clearly than others (Munro 2001: 78–79). In fact, in addition to the theme of a struggling young

[27] I find it important to note here that in my view, precisely because of her questioning of the fundamentalist and traditional Mennonite culture, Nomi cannot be considered a reliable guide to her culture, and the reader must remain aware of the fact that Nomi's narration can only ever be an individual's interpretation, as can the reader's analysis of it. Moreover, my reading of *A Complicated Kindness* is not intended to be a statement about Canadian Mennonite culture in general, especially as there is no such thing as a homogenous Mennonite community (see Steffler 2009: 131).

artist, the two novels have very similar settings, as the locale of both Munro's and Toews's narrative is a remote and rural small town that, in its attempt to shield itself from the outside world, resembles settler forts and garrisons.

The settler experience of living in garrisons has in fact given shape to some of the recurrent themes and literary tropes in Canadian literature and literary criticism as the settler is another mythical figure of Canadian culture (Atwood 1972: 94–95, 113, 120). While its implications of cultural hybridity link *A Complicated Kindness* more specifically to questions of Canadian immigrant writing, which I will discuss in more detail in the following sections, Kroeker (2003: 240) duly notes that in order to maintain their cultural and geographical separation in Western Canada, Mennonites have had to engage in settler colonialist practices (see also CK: 68). While Mennonite culture in Canada has traditionally been separatist and rural (Brandt 1993: 136; Kroeker 2003: 240), the idea of the sheltered fort in the wilderness has, in *A Complicated Kindness*, been taken to its extremes by the fundamentalist congregation of East Village. However, despite their attempt at constructing a home in mimicry of the Old world, the people of East Village have created a heterotopia where, as Macfarlane (2003: 226) argues, 'it is the space, not the subject that becomes invested with the preoccupations' of the hegemonic majority, as my analysis of the novel will show. Before moving on to a discussion of immigration and hybridity, I will consider *A Complicated Kindness* from the perspective of Anglo-Canadian settler writing in the following section, which juxtaposes the novel with Munro's small-town narrative *Lives of Girls and Women*.

5.1 The rural small town as a settler garrison

The typical Anglo-Canadian settler story, according to Atwood (1972: 94–95), is that of a garrison or a fort in the wilderness, surrounded by enemy territories – the French, Indigenous people, and monstrous nature. Physical survival indeed was a prominent preoccupation among such pioneering communities, with the borders of their forts being considered as the borders between civilization and what seemed like an uncontrollable chaos (New 1997: 80). However, for the Russian immigrants of Nomi's hometown

(CK: 91), the wilderness does not represent the kind of threat that early pioneers considered it to be; what threatens the cultural survival of their town and Mennonite heritage are the cultural influences imposed, and increasingly sought after, from outside the borders of their garrison, a small town called East Village. Led by a group of elders with Nomi's Uncle Hans in charge, the town has closed down all 'visible exits' such as public transportation in order to shield the town against outside influences (CK: 10, 53). For the Mennonite community Canada is, as Atwood (1972: 121–122) notes is typical of settler fiction, 'a place of exile' where the building of a fort that shelters them against the chaos of the outside, and creating a community that receives its authority from the mimicry of culture of the country of origin are perceived to be the primary tasks.

Dubbed The Mouth by the Nickel sisters (CK: 45), Uncle Hans becomes a 21st century representation of the Atwoodian male settler who sets out to reconstruct Europe by creating a community that abides by the traditional values brought over from Europe, considering his actions 'as part of the Divine Plan' (Atwood 1972: 122). With his authority resting on that of both European cultural heritage and the church, as in the case of the early settlers (see Atwood 1972: 120–122; New 1997: 79–80), Hans governs East Village – to Nomi a place so 'severe' that she presumes that most of the people of the community who have died 'choked to death because of anger' or 'suffocated from unexpressed feeling[s] of unhappiness' (CK: 4) – using fear as a tool of control:

> Main Street is as dead as ever. There's a blinding white light at the water-tower end of it and Jesus standing in the centre of it in a pale blue robe with his arms out, palms up, like he's saying how the hell would I know? […] On the other end is another giant billboard that says SATAN IS REAL. CHOOSE NOW. (CK: 47.)

While the church's rhetoric of redemption promises the possibility of eternal happiness in heaven, Hans emphasizes the importance of following the law (CK: 47, 174; c.f. Atwood 1972: 122), constantly keeping the population aware of what will happen to those who do not conform with signs, sermons and Sunday school teachers set out to remind the people of the possibility of eternal damnation (e.g. CK: 47, 84, 147).

In East Village, then, the private sphere is shown to collide with the public in the way that Bhabha (1992: 141–142; 1994: 9–10) describes as typical of unhomely postcolonial fictions. People's personal, every-day decisions are effectively governed by the religious policies of the community to the extent that Mrs. Peters, a lonely woman whom Nomi frequently visits to comfort her because of her loss of a son, only has white appliances because she thinks people might consider coloured ones 'pre-sins'[28] (CK: 60–61). As the opening paragraph of the novel, discussed above, suggests, in *A Complicated Kindness* home as house emerges as a space where the world invades with terrible consequences: those who do not conform to the rules of the town risk losing their homes and family as a consequence of being excommunicated by the elders. Nomi reveals that excommunicated family members sometimes continue to live with their families although they have to be treated like ghosts by the entire community, including family. Like the Haisla ghosts of Robinson's novel, the ghosts of East Village form an unspeakable element of the local community and its fundamentalist culture, although their presence – or their absence, if they have decided to leave – continues to affect the lives of their families. Having personal experience of the consequences of excommunication on a family, the protagonist begins to thoroughly question the premises of the interpretation of the Bible that the Mennonite community is relying on in its everyday functions. (e.g. CK: 35–37, 43–45, 79.)

In settler narratives, the idea of home as house has several implications: while it represents civilization and order, the settlers' triumph over the chaos of the wilderness, the house is also the designated space of women in the wilderness (Atwood 1972: 120–122; New 1997: 79–80; Sturgess 2003: 20), as I already mentioned in my discussion of Susanna Moodie's narrative in chapter three. For women, home as house can become the kind of prison that it was for Moodie, as Atwood (1972: 122–123) in fact argues that in the process of constructing a mimicry of Europe in the wilderness by creating the sheltered forts with their churches and houses, the male settlers in Canadian fiction come to control not only nature but also the women of their communities by fencing

[28] No explanation is given for the term *pre-sin*, but presumably it refers to objects or deeds that could be considered expressions of vanity or desire for worldly pleasures and therefore verging on sinning.

them in man-made categories that define what is seen as the 'universal order'. While the patriarchal cultures of both the settler towns discussed here, that of Jubilee as well as East Village, generally confine women to the private sphere of home, thus reflecting the position of women in settler fiction (see e.g. New 1997: 79–80; Macfarlane 2003: 228; Sturgess 2003: 20), the novels also focus on the fact that the separation of the private and the public is an ambivalent one, as one affects the other deeply. This shows especially in the lives of women who, like Nomi and her mother and sister, or like Del and her mother in, share the need to express the kind of 'artistic individuality' that, according to Brandt (1993: 136; 2005: 21), is stifled in both traditional Mennonite communities and fictional Canadian rural communities in general.

Del, who has grown up in a town where girls are expected to get married after finishing school, and where reading is not a hobby that is generally perceived as acceptable for a girl, nevertheless receives affirmation of her artistic gift at school, where she excels (Munro 2001: 131, 195–200, 213–215). For her, the question becomes that of being able to break away from the stifling community, a chance that education can provide, as well as realizing that her own experience and the everyday reality of a settler town are as worthy things to write about as the subject matters of the European masterpieces she has studied, as I argued in chapter three. Atwood (1972: 193) in fact chooses Del's final exclamation of independence as an artist at the end of the novel as an example of that moment when Canadian writing finally sheds the familiar storyline of the writer unable to function in a colonial community that does not appreciate his or her artistic abilities (e.g. Atwood 1972: 184–185). The protagonist of *A Complicated Kindness*, however, resembles the colonial 'paralyzed artist' who fails to produce works of art because of a lack of self-esteem due to little encouragement from her community (cf. Atwood 1972: 177, 189). However, for Nomi it is also a question of limited subject matter, because the politics of her hometown strongly affect the things she is allowed to write about at school: "So far in English I was not allowed to write about Kahlil Gibran, Marianne Faithful lyrics, marigold seeds, Holden Caulfield, Nietzsche, Django, Nabokov, preternatural gifts for self-analysis, urges, blowtorches, and now Turkish weddings' (CK: 152). In Nomi's case the public, the strict religious principles of her garrison of a hometown, comes to affect not only everyday decisions, but also something as

extremely personal as what she can think, write and talk about, as her interests lie outside the scope of subjects deemed appropriate in East Village where cultural influences from the outside, such as American popular culture, are unacceptable.

As a paralyzed artist, then, Nomi is 'already anticipating failure' with regard to the school assignment that she is writing for English class in order to graduate from high school, because of her 'problem with endings' (CK: 1). The narratee of *A Complicated Kindness*, it turns out, is her English teacher Mr. Quiring (CK: 242–243), to whom Nomi is writing her assignment, her attempt to write a story that will 'come, organically, to a preordained ending that is quite out of the writer's control,' as she has been told in class stories will come (CK: 1). Thus, in Nomi, Toews has created a character whose process of writing is challenged with two typically Canadian dilemmas, the fear of failure as an artist, and the inability to write stories with an ending (c.f. Atwood 1972: 189; Kroetsch 2004: 65, 68). As Atwood (1972: 189) maintains, the problem facing the artist in a colonial society is twofold: 'stay in the culture and be crippled as an artist; or escape into nothing.' While Nomi decides to make an attempt at writing 'from the centre of her own experience' (Atwood 1972: 193) like Del, her narrative voice is one that doubts itself while searching for the vocabulary to describe living in East Village:

> I could smell the wind coming through the open window […] and it was like a present or a compliment or something. […] It's the certain smell of that wind and the sudden whoosh of heat that just undoes me. It's a June wind, mostly. An embrace. (Did I just say *embrace*? Asshole.) (CK: 59–60).

Like Del at the end of *Lives of Girls and Women*, Nomi is engaged in 'the expression of the hitherto unexpressed: naming the world' (Atwood 1972: 193) as she sees it, not as she has been taught to see it.

Her description of her hometown deviates from the official version of how East Village is supposed to be perceived, and of the way she herself has experienced her hometown until the disappearance of her mother, which has left her in doubt of everything she has thought to be true. While she 'dream[s] of escaping into the *real* world' (CK: 6), she is comforted by the June wind that reminds her of being 'in the world' despite the

unreality of her silent hometown (CK: 198). In fact, while for the central female characters in Toews's and in Munro's novels, 'the real world' lies beyond the borders of the settler garrisons of East Village and Jubilee, the 'city/non-city binary' (New 1997: 156) remains pronounced in both novels, reflecting Atwood's (1972: 149) notion of the city as a site of struggle for the 20th century immigrant. This binary, which according to New (1997: 156), is a somewhat ambivalent division that is nevertheless ever-present in both Canadian cultural and political life, and which I discussed briefly in the previous chapter in relation to Atwood's *Surfacing*, is strongly reflected in the position taken towards the city by the various characters living in these small, rural communities (e.g. Munro 2001: 27–31, 264; CK: 7, 18–19, 53, 56, 58). Depending on the perspective, the city comes to represent 'violence, sleaze, crowding, corruption, potential of anonymity, […] the loss of old values, the acquisition of new values, and sophistication' (New 1997: 156). The idea of the city as a space of corruption and sin has been presented to the community of East Village with such force that Nomi remembers having been horrified, as a child, when she discovered that her big sister had a city library card (CK: 47, 58, 119).

As a fictional town East Village typifies the literary portrayals of Canadian rural small towns in its 'focus on hypocrisy […], making it appear that duplicity is one of the most highly celebrated of those rural "community values"' (New 1997: 157). An extreme example of this is the imprisonment of Nomi's grandmother who, because an alcoholic, must remain in her farmhouse and be watched over by her family, who prevent her from leaving, so that she would not have to be excommunicated by her own son, whose religious rhetoric suggests alcoholics are sinners. Hence Nomi's grandmother, one of the first Mennonites to arrive in East Village and therefore a first-generation settler, experiences physically the imprisonment that Moodie complained about in the Canadian bush. (e.g. CK: 91, 180). Whereas in Munro's Jubilee the women breaking the norm of the housewife serving her family are faced with being perceived by others as eccentric and ridiculous, like Del's mother and her boarder Fern (e.g. Munro 2001: 72–73, 90–91, 160, 200), in East Village those who do not conform to norms are faced with the threat of becoming ghosts to their families. The hypocrisy of the patriarchy of East Village is most strongly visible in the cases of the shunning of both Nomi and her mother, as both

are excommunicated on grounds of reports on their misbehaviour with no mention of the breaking of town rules by the men involved. Trudie is reported by Mr. Quiring, who is in love with her, to have engaged in adulterous activities with several male community members, thus providing an ending out of Nomi's control for the story of the Nickel family (CK: 243). Despite his actions, he has no understanding of Nomi's behaviour as she mourns the loss of her mother; instead, as a teacher threatening to hold Nomi back for 'lack of attendance,' he becomes one of the official reasons for her own excommunication, too (CK: 208, 235).

In the end, Nomi is shunned because she sets her boyfriend Travis's car on fire after discovering that he has cheated on her, and thus apparently practised premarital sex, which is generally condemned in the community (CK: 134, 229–230, 235). In the cases of both Nomi and Trudie the reports by other community members are, for the elders in charge of excommunication, only a pretence for eliminating members of society who, in their open questioning of its values, 'have a reputation in [the] town as being crazy,' as Mr. Quiring tells Trudie in a blackmailing letter (CK: 235). Both mother and daughter have attacked Hans, the leader of the town and their family member, in person for his politics of fear (CK: 171–172, 174–175) that affect the lives of the people of East Village in deeply personal ways. Here, within the realms of a family that breaks apart because of its differences with respect to the preservation of a fundamentalist culture brought over from Europe, the functioning of the traditional Mennonite community comes to be questioned, and the sheltered community of East Village is shown to be one of cultural hybridity rather than uniformity. Hybridity, as I noted in chapter two, has been largely debated in Canadian postcolonial research in relation to non-European diasporic communities, but in the following section I will argue that the concept relates to immigrants from Europe as well, as the Mennonite community of Toews's novel struggles with the generational transmission of cultural heritage and is faced with the dilemma of belonging and non-belonging that captures the immigrant experience.

5.2 The immigrant community and cultural hybridity

Nomi's constant search for the right words to describe the world and her extensive vocabulary from which to choose, suggestive as they are that her grasp of the English language is that of a native speaker, is, as Steffler (2009: 127–128) notes, curiously at odds with Nomi's contention that nobody speaks good English in East Village (CK: 130). It is the question of language, Kroeker (2003: 240–241) argues, that especially ties Mennonite writing to postcolonial discourse and the notion of hybridity. Having long remained linguistically separated from English-speaking Canada by continuing to use Low German as the language of both education and religion, as in the case of the elderly people in East Village, the generations of the 1950s and 1960s, like Nomi's parents, received their education in English because of the increasing pressures towards assimilation from the Canadian authorities, who, at that time, were not encouraging multicultural diversity (Kroeker 2003: 242). Contemporary Mennonite writers, having been part of the first generations to receive their education in English, come to challenge the imperial language from within with their often subversive use of it in their work (Kroeker 2003: 241–242).

In Nomi's case the 'desire to name' (Atwood 1972: 62), then, may be read as much as a result of her questioning the world itself as an example of linguistic alienation (c.f Ashcroft et al. 1989: 135–137, 140–141), as the English language does not easily accommodate the description of the Mennonite experience and reality: 'I'd just been excommunicated, shunned, banished, exiled, whatever you want to call it,' the narrator exclaims after her fate in the community has been resolved by the elders, making her a ghost to the people of her hometown as well as her father, and none of the words she tries on seems to describe her situation exactly (CK: 240). However, the English language comes to undermine the authorities of East Village, too. It is because of their ability to speak the language that the people of East Village are able to read city library books forbidden from the church library, read newspapers, and watch unaccepted television shows. Her knowledge of the English language makes it possible for Nomi to acquire information that challenges the worldview of her people, making her realize that her school textbook might as well be called, as she maintains, '*Proven Theories We*

Decry' (CK: 13). As the effect of the assimilation policies of the Canadian government, then, the Mennonite community becomes a colonial hybrid where two contesting worldviews need to be negotiated. The enforced learning of English comes to disturb the generational transmission of Mennonite cultural values, as the capability to speak English enables the people to seek other knowledges than those promoted by their traditional community, while the majority language is at odds with the minority experience with insufficient vocabulary to describe the Mennonite reality.

In fact, the immigrants' generational process of settling into a new country, which I discussed briefly in chapter two in relation to Canadian multicultural communities, is highly visible in *A Complicated Kindness*. However, in the case of fundamentalist East Village the process is shown to be more complicated than Atwood (1972) supposes. She (1972: 155) states that for 20th century immigrants, Canada poses the question of whether to assimilate and let go of the cultural values of the past, or to reject Canada altogether in order to maintain the cultural heritage of the immigrant community. She (1972: 149) furthermore maintains that this dilemma is most typically shown in three-generational novels where the first generation of immigrants holds on to the old cultural values, with the second generation hoping 'to abandon them in favour of the new,' and the third possibly 'functioning as symbols of integration' into the new society. This reading, as I already mentioned in chapter two, is to some extent supported by both the discussion in more recent theoretical works (see e.g. Kanaganayakam 2003: 144–145; Gunew 2008: 9), as well as the portrayal of the immigrant community in *A Complicated Kindness*, where the generation of Nomi's grandparents, having immigrated to Canada during the First World War, have been able to keep alive the cultural and linguistic heritage of the countries of their origin (e.g. CK: 39, 163, 201). Yet, as the differences between Trudie and her brother Hans indicate, for the second generation of immigrants in the novel the question of assimilation has resulted in very different answers.

While some community members of the second generation may have wished to embrace Canada as a new home 'in Canada's terms' as the tendency is for the second-generation immigrants who generally seek to abandon their cultural heritage in favour of new values (Atwood 1972: 155), the patriarchal, isolated immigrant community as a whole,

with its emphasis on the ways of the past, continues to consider Canada as a threat to its own culture. Although receiving their education in English has enabled the second generation – that of Nomi's mother, father and her uncle – to seek influences, experiences and knowledge from outside their immigrant community, their knowledge of the majority language has not given them an easy access to the majority culture, as the experiences of Hans prove:

> The Mouth had some very bad experiences in his life when he was younger […] and […] after those experiences he came back to Shitville to rule with an iron fist. […] I think he had tried to rebel against the thing he came back later to stand for and while living in the city […] he couldn't write proper poetry like the Beats and was mocked for it. And for his clothing that tried too hard and his eagerness to be hip and his inability to shave properly […] and eventually he gave up and came back here full of renunciations and ideas of purging every last bastion of so-called fun in this place and a greatly renewed interest in death and a fresh loathing of the world. (CK: 50.)

As his story indicates, Hans has in fact tried to 'rebel against' the values of the past in the manner that Atwood (1972: 149) finds typical of second generation immigrants who wish to integrate to their new homeland. However, in her account of his story Nomi touches the issue raised by numerous contemporary critics of the politics of multiculturalism in Canada: that despite the Canadian government's professed support of multicultural diversity, integration to a society in which even third and fourth generation immigrants continue to be defined by their ethnicity and immigrant status instead of being perceived as "Canadians" is far from easy (see e.g. Bannerji 2004; Gunew 2008: 9, 11).

Although he is white and of European origin, the above example suggests that Hans has been rejected by Anglo-Canadian society for being different. Thus Atwood's (1972: 149–159) contention that immigrants from any other than Anglo- or Franco-Canadian backgrounds are confronted with an unwelcoming society, as well as the paragraph from *A Complicated Kindness*, suggest that Bannerji (2004: 296–297) may be correct in her argument of an Anglo-Canadian hegemony as the political and cultural reality of Canada and her subsequent suggestion that this poses the dilemma of both belonging and non-belonging for the immigrants. While the people of the Mennonite community

of East Village are Canadian citizens, they are nevertheless perceived as the exotic Other in the country, and are perceived through negative imagery by the dominant majority, as Bhabha (1994: 111–113) argues is typical in a colonial culture that is forced to face its own hybridity. Besides being considered an old-fashioned remnant of their European past (e.g. CK: 5, 11, 47–48), they also become representative cases of mental illness due to religious fundamentalism when the non-Mennonite doctor working in the local hospital suggests in 'an article for the city paper' that East Village 'has colossally huge numbers of depressed people' (CK: 134). This places the third-generation immigrants like Nomi, who nevertheless identify with, and are identified as, Mennonites despite their increasing wish to assimilate to the majority culture, in a position of in-betweenness where they seem to belong nowhere, especially as their community portrays everything outside the borders of East Village as evil and chaotic (e.g. CK: 7, 48, 58, 115).

However, although Nomi longs to see 'the real world,' sees cities as spaces of liberation, constantly discussing relocating to Montreal or Paris with her boyfriend, and considers New York as the place where she would most like to live (CK: 53, 123, 165), she remains in East Village and entertains herself by sitting on a hill and looking at the city lights in the distance (CK: 74, 238), or by riding her bicycle 'to the border' to 'stare at America' (CK: 56). Her reluctance to leave her hometown despite her growing anger towards the fundamentalist patriarchal regime is, in addition to her not wishing to abandon her father, connected to the realization that in 'the real world,' she would most probably continue to be perceived as an exotic Other:

> I have realized that my personal yearning to be in New York […] is for the rest of the world a joke. When you're a Mennonite you can't even yearn properly for the world because the world turns that yearning into comedy. It's a funny premise for a movie, that's all. Mennonite girl in New York City. […] It's terribly depressing to realize that your innermost desires are being tested in Hollywood for laughs per minute. (CK: 135.)

Besides suggesting that the idea of integration into 'the real world,' be it the city of Montreal or New York, or any place outside the immigrant community for that matter, is not an easy transition for the immigrant subject who will be considered an outsider by

the dominant majority, the above paragraph furthermore testifies to the hybridity of the East Village Mennonite community. The official discourse of the fundamentalist town comes to be affected and challenged by the denied knowledges that the people are able to acquaint themselves with as a result of learning English.

In fact, it is precisely their portrayal as the exotic Other, the realization that '[w]e're a national joke,' as Nomi's big sister Tash puts it when she begins to question the fundamentalism of her hometown (CK: 70–71), that results in the young people's increasing rebellion towards the cultural heritage brought over from Europe. While few of them are willing to leave the shelter of their community behind, they come to challenge its cultural values from within as they act in ways that deviate from the behaviour considered as proper. Like Nomi's vocabulary to describe her experience of her hometown and of being a Mennonite, a mixture of biblical allusions and references to American popular culture, the young people's lives in East Village are somewhere in-between these two different worlds:

> Saturday nights you'd have a hundred or more kids down [at the pits] drinking, dropping, smoking, swearing, screwing, […] passing out and throwing up before church the next morning when everyone would be back in the pew with Mom and Dad […] flipping through Deuteronomy and harmonizing to 'The Old Rugged Cross' (CK: 34).

Ironically called 'the pits' in reference to hell, the young people of East Village have a designated space of resistance within the limits of their hometown, which indicates that not only the culture but the spatial limits of the Mennonite community are affected in a way that effectively questions its premises and blurs the line between isolation and assimilation.

Moreover, their behaviour reflects the way in which, Atwood (1972: 154) argues, the third-generation immigrants may be able to negotiate between 'the spiritual values of the first generation and the material ones of the second.' While they do not wish to denounce their cultural heritage altogether, they nevertheless accept some cultural elements from the majority culture into their lives and act like 'normal' teenagers in Canada. Thus they come to question not only the values of their immigrant community

but also, I would argue, those of the majority. For most adolescents of Nomi's generation the wish to adopt the influences of the majority culture is limited precisely to those elements of that culture that the elders of their community consider corrupt and sinful – movies and television series like the *Twilight Zone*, alcohol, drugs, rock 'n' roll music, and sexual liberation (e.g. CK: 12, 14–15, 22–23, 68–69, 115, 194, 196). Instigating the kind of colonial hybridity Bhabha (1994: 111–115) speaks of, the colonized minority, conceived of through negative imagery of backwardness and simplicity by the colonizing majority that assumes its cultural authority to lie in its superior civilization and extensive scientific knowledge, thus comes to challenge and disturb precisely the idea of the superiority of the colonizer in their infusion of cultural elements and knowledge.

Another instance of such colonial hybridity is the museum village built next to the real town, 'a town that exists in the world based on the idea of not existing in the world,' as Nomi notes (CK: 48). East Village is a popular tourist attraction especially among Americans, who come there 'for a first-hand look at simple living' (CK: 11), and while the construction of a museum village to attract even more tourists suggests that the colonized minority willingly participates in its portrayal as exotic Other, it is a hybrid site that is both a product of, and resistant to, the colonizing majority culture (c.f. Bhabha 1994: 112). However, as the need to construct a museum village in order to satisfy the tourists' desire for the exotic Other suggests, the minority culture has already been affected by the imposition of cultural elements foreign to itself:

> Americans who come into our *real* town are either surprised or disappointed or both. They see some of us sitting on the curb smoking Sweet Caps, wearing tube tops, and they don't like it. They pay good money to see bonnets and aprons and horse-drawn wagons. (CK: 53, emphasis mine.)

The creation of the museum village right next to the 'real town' thus comes to highlight the fact that the Mennonite community of East Village is an imagined community, exactly as Gunew (2008: 9) suggests diasporic communities to be. Apparently aware of this, the elders have constructed an 'artificial village' (CK: 53) in order to draw in tourists intrigued by the Mennonites' exotic Otherness, but the tourists' desire for the

Other turns into fear as they are faced with similarity rather than difference upon entering the real town. As the realization of the hybridity of the Mennonite community, which has previously been thought of simply as different and inferior, enters the world of the majority, it also comes to challenge their knowledge of the world (c.f. Bhabha 1994: 113–114).

Such, in fact, is also the impact of Nomi's narrative, which constructs East Village as home as precisely the kind of heterotopia Macfarlane (2003: 226–227) speaks of, as Nomi refuses to define home through oppositional terms, challenging the notions of home and knowledge of both the hegemonic majority and her community. In fact, in a town where 'there is no room for in between' (CK: 10), everyone turns out to be in-between cultures, languages and feelings of both belonging and non-belonging at the same time, making the town a 'transhistoric site' where 'cultural hybridities emerge in moments of historical transformation' (Bhabha 1994: 2, 9) that the Mennonite community is going through. While the museum village remains there as 'a memory of home' (Chakraborty 2003: 128), the real town is unhomely proof that the relocation of the Mennonite community and their subsequent negotiation of belonging and non-belonging in their new environment have resulted in cultural hybridity. The narrator of the novel serves as a testimony of this hybridity, as it becomes clear during the course of her story that after the disappearance of her mother, her notions of home have crumbled, showing how the public decision-making system of her hometown deeply affects the personal world of the adolescent girl. Subsequently, the nostalgia invested in creating a town that functions as mimicry of 'homeland' also comes to inform the way in which Nomi constructs an idea of home in memory after the forced break-down of her family, as my analysis below suggests.

5.3 Negotiating home through nostalgia

In *Survival*, Atwood (1972: 121, 154) argues that for the fictional settler and 20th century immigrant alike, Canada appears primarily as a place of exile where notions of home are complicated by the cultural values of 'the old country' being in conflict the

new environment. However, whether considered settlers or immigrants, the Mennonites of Toews's novel also show that despite this conflict, emigration is also invested with hope and desire for a new home and belonging. Gunew (2008: 8) in fact argues that 'concepts of "home" are at the heart of debates on diaspora,' and wonders whether the question of home, for diasporic immigrants, is always necessarily linked to the idea of 'return to some […] nostalgically invested motherland' or whether the feeling of non-belonging in the new society is more connected to 'a sense of un-homeliness' in an unwelcoming environment. Chakraborty (2003: 128), on the other hand, reads much of Canadian diasporic writing as 'nostalgic narratives' that create 'not only a memory of home, but a home in memory,' thus suggesting that for diasporic immigrants the notion of home comes to be defined through a nostalgic longing for the past. This indeed seems to be true of the East Village Mennonites who, by attempting to maintain their cultural and geographic separation from the Canadian society, are able to construct a nation within a nation and to maintain a specific Mennonite cultural identity.

While the first generation of Mennonite immigrants, like Nomi's grandparents, has allowed some cultural influences from the outside, they also show longing for the home in memory, telling nostalgic narratives of their past in Europe and Russia where their families had large estates before their forced relocation during World War I (e.g. CK: 163, 220). However, as Gunew (2008: 8–9) argues may be true of many diasporic immigrant communities, the fundamentalist community members of the second generation, led by Uncle Hans, do not seem to entertain the nostalgic idea of return to the old homeland. Nevertheless they have struck '"roots" […] in the celebratory romance of the past' (Bhabha 1994: 9) to separate their community from the majority, which they perceive as unwelcoming and, when it comes to cultural survival, a threat. For them, Canada thus remains a place of exile where the desire for a home manifests itself in the creation of a town reminiscent of 'home' culturally. Bhabha (1994: 9) in fact notes that while 'asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories' is of 'crucial importance […] for subordinated peoples' in colonial societies, this process is always affected by a sense of unhomeliness that is the consequence of 'the relocation of the home and the world,' because the effects of the political on the personal have mutated the culture in question. In other words, the

"relocation" of their home into the New world leaves the Mennonite diasporic community subject to Anglo-Canadian cultural domination that has affected their culture despite the separatist ideology of the leaders of the community.

For Nomi, the notion of home has centred on three intertwined ideas prior to her sister and mother's rebellion and disappearance: that of East Village as a place where she has felt protected and loved all through her childhood; that of heaven as the ultimate home, as the official religious discourse of her hometown suggests; and that of her family's house as home (e.g. CK: 16–18, 25–26, 54, 58–60, 89–92, 109–111, 209). All of these ideas, defining the notion of home in Nomi's world, are disturbed as other knowledges begin to enter it. When the world enters Nomi's home, the house her family lives in, it becomes clear to her that even the sphere, perceived as personal and private, is in fact affected by the political and public to a great extent. Her sister and mother's questioning of the fundamentalism of East Village resulted, Nomi remembers, in a feeling of something strange happening in the Nickel household: family arguments emerged between mother and daughter as well as mother and the father who remained faithful to the official discourse of his community, and Hans frequently came by to discuss the situation and pray with Nomi's parents while apparently also forcing his sister to work for the church to keep up appearances (CK: 26, 93–94, 101–103, 109, 115–120, 164). After both Tash and Trudie left East Village, the house in which Nomi and Ray live ceased to feel like a place of belonging, and the narrator assures the readers that '[b]eing seasick at sea is not the same thing as being homesick at home' (CK: 78), suggesting that as her family has been affected by the fundamentalist politics of East Village, house as home has become an unhomely space of non-belonging.

In addition to being filled with 'painful memories' of a home filled with love (CK: 109), the house is filled with secrets of both the past and the present, which the protagonist has only recently begun to grasp. While doing such a mundane chore as the laundry, Nomi discovers Mr. Quiring's love letters to Trudie, including the final blackmail letter that explains why her mother was excommunicated, thus finding out about her mother's adultery as well as her teacher's duplicity (CK: 191, 243). It takes her longer, however, to discover why her father does not bother about the bullet hole in their front window

and where the disappearing furniture is going, as she does not realize that her father understands the politics of East Village better than his apparently clueless manner suggests. As he is already anticipating Nomi's excommunication, Ray is selling the furniture in order to raise as much money for his daughter as he possibly can. (e.g. CK: 4, 73, 87–88, 140–143, 160–163, 166, 221, 239.) Nevertheless the narrator, whose notions of home have become increasingly complex as the public moments have shaped her private world, as well as her knowledge of the world, to the extent that she is deeply confused as to the meaning of the word 'here' (e.g. CK: 72, 217), seems reluctant to leave East Village and all its people behind (e.g. CK: 2, 46, 60, 227).

Despite being an unhomely locale of severity and eerie silence (e.g. CK: 4, 14), Nomi's East Village is also a place where 'there is complicated kindness' (CK: 46); people who know her and care for her, and places that feel like home. In fact, the position Nomi takes towards her isolated hometown also suggests a critique of the way in which Canadian fictional small towns are typically portrayed as places of 'ethical and aesthetic stasis' (New 1997: 156) that the artistically gifted young woman needs to escape in order to express herself. In one of the many imaginary conversations that Nomi has with her sister Tash, the protagonist could be as well addressing precisely this tradition, or Munro's Del, instead of her big sister, whose rebellion and originality make Nomi feel inferior:

> You taught me that some people can leave and some can't and those who can will always be infinitely cooler than those who can't and I'm one of the ones who can't because you're one of the ones who did and there's this old guy in a wool suit sitting in an empty house who has no one but me now thank you very, very much (CK: 225).

The narrator of *A Complicated Kindness* thus attacks the notion of those who cannot escape being ultimately failures as artists (Atwood 1972: 184–187, 189; Kroetsch 2004: 64–65; Brandt 2005: 21). At the end of the novel, Nomi's fear of failure nevertheless turns into contentment with survival – one that does not suggest victory, but no defeat either (CK: 242, 246).

Steffler (2009: 125–126) points out several parallels between the endings of Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and *A Complicated Kindness*, and one of them seems

especially related to the notion of home in Canada: The moment in both novels when the protagonists finally begin to see their hometowns with piercing clarity, not as something to be belittled but as real, worth reminiscing and writing about (Munro 2001: 275–276; CK: 241–242). For Nomi, this moment comes after her excommunication, as she is loading the car her father has left for her with the things she intends to take with her upon leaving:

> I closed my eyes and that's when the odd thing happened. I started to see things in my town clearly, the pits, the fire on the water […], and American tourists and The Mouth and Main Street […] and everything, everything in town, the whole of East Village, and it didn't seem so awful to me any more in that instant that I knew I'd probably never see it again except for every time I closed my eyes. (CK: 241–242.)

Although her view of her hometown has altered after her family has broken apart, Nomi constructs, exactly as Chakraborty (2003: 128) suggests, 'a home in memory' while nevertheless realizing that a different reality, 'the real world,' is something that is within her reach (CK: 240–242). Her vision, like that of Del's at the end of *Lives of Girls and Women*, also appears to have sparked her narrative, proving the rural town to be a space of creativity, too.

Finally, however, Nomi's notion of home is one that is based on hope. Instead of believing in the possibility that both her parents have committed suicide, as some of their actions before their disappearances might suggest (e.g. CK: 21, 82, 220, 239, 245), Nomi decides to believe in the possibility 'of being reunited, of being happy again, somewhere in the real world, our family' (CK: 245), and the home in memory thus turns into home in hope. Readers are left with the knowledge of Nomi's survival, not of the victory of entering the real world but the possibility of her doing so, exactly as in the case of Munro's Del, as well as with the narrator's final questions that ultimately challenge the judgment of both her community and outsiders: 'I've learned, from living in this town, that stories are what matter […]. East Village has given me the faith to believe in the possibility of a happy family reunion someday. Is it wrong to trust in a beautiful lie if it helps you get through life [?]' (CK: 245–246.) Nomi's account of what she has learned, living in her unhomely hometown, effectively questions both systems

of knowledge that have collided in her world. Although her words suggest that she considers the Bible just another story, they also challenge the Western scientific worldview, asking whether such stories may in fact give more hope than freedom and scientific facts.

While it is easy for the non-Mennonite reader to sympathize with Nomi and Trudie's 'silent raging against the simplisticness [sic]' of East Village (CK: 46) and wonder why Nomi does not simply leave like her mother and sister have, the same reader may be puzzled by Nomi's complete lack of desire for revenge on Mr. Quiring (CK: 244), as well as her seeming naivety as she wonders what her father meant by a note that he left her upon disappearing from East Village after Nomi's excommunication: 'He'd written a PS too, another verse. And remember, when you are leaving, to brush the dust from your feet as a testimony against them. Against whom, I wondered. Against what?' (CK: 240). One interpretation of Nomi's refusal to condemn anyone might be Atwood's (1972: 249–250) idea of the Rapunzel Syndrome as the primary obstacle in Canadian fictional women's search for freedom. This interpretation would suggest that Nomi has internalized the fundamentalist, patriarchal values of her own community to the extent that she has become her own prison. However, as I have shown above, Nomi has been questioning these values ever since her mother's disappearance and it seems that it is ultimately her idea of home that causes the discrepancy between her actions and words, and the above example comes to represent the moment when the fictional Canadian character ultimately refuses to blame anything or anyone.

Thus Toews shows how the Canadian will to be a victim or inability to achieve anything beyond survival becomes 'a choice made from within,' exactly as Atwood (1972: 34) suggests. Despite her criticism of her hometown and its fundamentalism, Nomi has been able to reach the point when 'Victor/Victim games become obsolete' (Atwood 1972: 39), as she simply refuses to consider herself a victim. On the other hand her question – 'Against what?' (CK: 240) – makes a point, too: were she to blame Hans and her people, who have constructed an identity and a home based on their cultural heritage while seeking to remain apart from the majority culture that they consider immoral, it might well be argued that in a typically Canadian way, she comes to an explanation that

‘displaces the cause from the real source of oppression to something else’ (Atwood 1972: 37). In my reading of the novel, it becomes clear from her narrative that if not for the ridicule and Othering her community has experienced because of being different, the Nickel family as well as the whole of East Village might be in a different place. Thus ‘the voice from *within* the heterotopia’ (Macfarlane 2003: 226), Nomi’s voice, comes to question the vision of her own community as well as that of outsiders. Indeed, against whom should the culturally hybrid teenager – a ghost in her hometown because of her interest in the colonial majority culture, whose discriminatory practices suggest her community to be inferior – testify?

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of my thesis was to show that, despite having been criticized for being reductive as well as being overlooked in contemporary Canadian postcolonial criticism because of its premise of a national identity in the singular, Margaret Atwood's 1972 study of Canadian writing, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, nevertheless remains an influential record and source of Canadian cultural themes that even contemporary writers engage in a dialogue with. I maintained that Atwood's study could be considered a postcolonial text in its expression of anti-colonial sentiments as well as its discussion of themes and tropes that settler postcolonial discourse has engaged in since *Survival*'s publication, and although it has been criticized for its focus on the settler experience and Anglo-Canadian writing, I proved that the study indeed also reflects issues that contemporary postcolonial critics, concerned with multicultural Canada's cultural hybridity, have debated widely since the 1990s. I nevertheless noted that *Survival* does not sufficiently reflect the multicultural diversity of contemporary Canada, for instance in its lack of discussion on the Indigenous populations, and that its notion of *a* Canadian cultural identity was outdated. As contemporary Canadian postcolonial critics emphasize the importance of recognizing that the settler colony is a site of cultural fusion and multiple, conflicting memories, I suggested that juxtaposing Homi K. Bhabha's theory of unhomeliness, which he presents in his article 'The world and the home' and continues to discuss in *Locations of Culture*, with Atwood's thematic analysis of Canadian writing could offer new readings of postcolonial Canadian writing that took into account stories and histories so far hidden and unacknowledged.

I first studied how Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness and his suggestion of unhomely moments in postcolonial texts revealing the in-betweenness of the colonial or postcolonial experience, as they came to show that the personal and the private spheres of life were deeply affected by the political and the public reflecting the hybridity of the subject, emerged in texts studied by Atwood in *Survival*. I found Bhabha's theory to be applicable to Canadian women's writing, and furthermore noted that Atwood and Bhabha's works had the theme of home in common. The instability of the notion of home in Canada has so far not been widely discussed in Canadian postcolonial

discourse, except in relation to diasporic writing, but I aimed to show that 'home' was indeed an important concern in contemporary Canadian writing by women, exactly as Atwood and Bhabha suggest it to be. Moreover, I assumed that contemporary writing would reflect the kind of unhomeliness that is to be found in Atwood's accounts of settler and immigrant experiences of Canada while showing that as a space of multiple histories, Canada is a place where the political and the personal are shown to collide in a way that reveals the hybridity of the postcolonial subject, exactly as Bhabha suggests.

My selection of the two novels I analysed was based on the premise that they reflect the ethnic plurality of Canada as well as concerns typical of contemporary Canadian women's writing. While the two novels portray Canada from very different minority points-of-view, with Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* centring on the Indigenous experience and Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness* reflecting concerns of both settler and immigrant postcolonialism through the depiction of a fundamentalist Mennonite community, both novels feature an alienated adolescent female protagonist who narrates her thus far repressed story in the first person. Moreover, they both show continuity with the tradition of Canadian women's writing, as the wilderness quest theme of *Monkey Beach* connects it with Atwood's 1972 novel *Surfacing*, and Toews's novel has narrative elements in common with Munro's 1971 novel *Lives of Girls and Women*. In my analysis, then, I decided to discuss the contemporary novels separately in order to be able to compare them with their 1970s intertexts while discussing the texts in relation to themes that Atwood had found typical of Canadian writing, as well as Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness as the paradigmatic condition of postcolonial subjectivity.

In my analysis of Robinson's *Monkey Beach* I concentrated on three perspectives that reflected Atwood's key patterns of Canadian writing: that of *Monkey Beach* as a three-generational novel, the ways the novel came to challenge literary images of the Canadian wilderness, and the notion of the wilderness quest as a failed exploration. I showed how, through the personal histories of the three generations of the Hill family, the novel portrayed an Indigenous community deeply scarred by colonization, and suggested that Robinson thus affirms Atwood's notion of the Indigenous populations as

the ultimate social victims in Canadian writing. The unhomely moments in the text furthermore showed how the personal experiences of the members of the narrator's family had been affected by imperial and neo-colonial politics to the extent that the whole community seemed to be suffering from internalized victimization. I suggested that for the adolescent protagonist, the wilderness became a space of refuge where she was able to feel at home, and that this view of the wilderness, based on the Indigenous worldviews in place before the arrival of Europeans, effectively contested the settler tropes of nature writing that Atwood discussed in *Survival* and subsequently came to challenge herself in *Surfacing*. Both Atwood and Robinson's wilderness quests also represent a renegotiation of the notions of finding and conquering, usually associated with imperial exploration narratives, as my reading of the two novels suggested that, despite not being able to find anything concrete, in both novels the protagonists made a successful journey into the self, being finally able to refuse victimization. In addition I argued that the protagonist of *Monkey Beach* was able to achieve not only survival but victory as she reaffirmed belief in Indigenous knowledge, showing that despite the unhomeliness of neo-colonial Canada as home, the knowledge of the colonized has been preserved and will continue to challenge Euro-centric knowledges in a hybrid Canada.

My discussion of Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness* reflected the curious position that Mennonites occupy in Canada because, despite their European settler heritage, they remain an ethnic minority within the group of Euro-Canadians who, diasporic critics maintain, form a hegemonic majority in Canada. The protagonist's narrative was shown to portray a patriarchal town reminiscent of a settler garrison in a manner similar to Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, with which Toews's novel also shares the Canadian theme of the young artist being stifled by her suppressive community. In both novels, I noted, the patriarchal culture, which Atwood suggested to be typical of settler fiction, comes to deeply affect the personal lives of the women in town. However, I argued that the Mennonite community was one that was in a process of transformation as the generational transmission of Mennonite cultural values had been affected by the assimilative politics of the Anglo-Canadian majority, and while the Mennonite town remained an unhomely space for the narrator, it also came to be seen as a heterotopic space where the hybridity of the minority came to challenge the

worldview of the majority, too. My suggestion that the novel's discourse on home reflected both settler and immigrant writing was proven right, as the Mennonite community constructed a home in memory. However, like the narrator of Munro's novel, the protagonist was finally able to embrace her hometown as not only an unhomely remainder of the past but as a real space worth writing about, and thus write from the centre of her own world despite her suppressive community, and the Canadian notion of the rural small town as a space of creative stasis was thus reversed. My analysis furthermore suggested that the narrator of Toews's novel was, like the narrator of *Monkey Beach*, capable of refusing to be victim, although the story of her survival did not reflect the sense of victory I associated with the ending of *Monkey Beach*.

Having their protagonists refuse victimization, the authors of the two novels answer to Atwood's call for writers to take control of their own space and let go of the colonial mentality as well as the imperial tropes that according to her have given shape to the survival thematic in Canadian literature. Thus, even though *Survival* has been neglected in much of contemporary postcolonial literary criticism in Canada as a remnant of a phase of literary criticism that intentionally sought to construct an idea of and identity for Canada based on its white settler heritage, my analysis shows that the study may not be so out-of-date as Canadian critics have considered it to be, since it reflects concerns that are still topical in contemporary discussions on Canadianness. My reading of Robinson's and Toews's novels indicates that Atwood's 1972 analysis of Canadian themes and subject matters remains the kind of record and source of cultural codes that 21st century women writers come to contest and negotiate in their postcolonial texts as they seek to show how the colonial hybridity of Canada indeed makes the settler colony an unstable site for memory. Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness as the paradigmatic postcolonial experience proved a useful concept in the reading of contemporary Canadian women's writing in juxtaposition with Atwood's *Survival*, showing how the hybridity or the in-betweenness of the postcolonial subject is revealed in the texts in unhomely moments that destabilize the binary oppositions that imperial discourse, and thus also the texts discussed in Atwood's study, are based on.

While both of the 21st century women's novels I discussed engage in a dialogue with the Canadian literary tradition by reflecting and rewriting the themes and patterns of Canadian writing that Atwood studied in *Survival*, they also contest the historical master narratives of Canada, constructing it as an unhomely home where cultural hybridities emerge in the collisions of the personal experiences of the postcolonial subject and the political or public world they inhabit. In fact, my decision to discuss *Monkey Beach* and *A Complicated Kindness* separately was based on the misguided presumption that even though they both discussed Canada from minority positions and were set in rural and remote locations of the country, they would reflect different concerns. However, I discovered that there certainly are similarities between the novels that present interesting prospects for reading these two novels side by side. While the exotic Otherness of the Mennonite community was discussed in detail in my analysis of Toews's novel, points of comparison are to be found in Robinson's novel, too, although they were not discussed in my analysis of *Monkey Beach*. On the other hand, my analysis on *A Complicated Kindness* lacks discussion on Canadian wilderness tropes, and had such been discussed side by side with Robinson's, two alternative visions of the Canadian wilderness might have been discovered. Finally, both novels portray their alienated teenage protagonists as colonial hybrids who have to negotiate the notion of home in-between knowledge systems, finally coming to challenge the Western scientific worldview from the point of view of their marginalized communities.

However, my analysis also suggests that this questioning of master narratives and of ideas of Canadianness, as well as the experience of the Canadian locale as an unhomely one, is a postcolonial theme that is not limited to 21st century women's writing. Indeed, whether because they wish to engage in a conversation with the tradition of women's writing intentionally or because of their subject matters being cultural themes that continue to intrigue Canadian women writers through generations, Robinson and Toews explore narrative patterns and unhomely Canadian locales that earlier women authors, such as Atwood and Alice Munro, have reflected on in novels that provide further expressions of what it means to be Canadian and how Canada as a home is conceived of. However, the limited scope of the thesis came to affect the analyses of the four novels discussed here, as there was not enough space to discuss all the aspects of the

novels that related to *Survival* or unhomeliness. For instance, the issue of American cultural imperialism, to which Atwood pays central attention in *Survival*, was never discussed in my thesis, although all of the novels I analysed would give opportunity to do so. Moreover, the novels' portrayal of sexual transgressions, such as rape, abortion and adultery, which affect the young female protagonists in severe ways, were left out of the discussion as they did not seem to particularly reflect any of Atwood's Canadian key patterns, whereas they certainly would prompt discussions on unhomeliness and the notions of conquering associated with imperial discourse.

While there appear to be many prospects for a more extensive discussion on these novels, as well as their connection to the tradition that Atwood describes and in a move towards postcolonialism asks Canadian authors to depart from, it is nevertheless my opinion that the two 21st century novels alone do not sufficiently reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Canada. A sense of unhomeliness and notions of cultural hybridity are central to Robinson's and Toews's novels, but, as I noted in my thesis, writers from minority groups have generally been questioning and renegotiating Canadian master narratives of history as well as literary tropes based on imperial discourse since the 1970s, when women, ethnic immigrants and Indigenous peoples began to have more frequent access to mainstream publishing. My analysis of these two novels suggests that theoretical discussions on in-betweenness and non-belonging can prove fruitful in other Canadian postcolonial contexts than non-white immigrant writing, to which such discussions have so far mostly been limited. Thus, reading these two contemporary novels that reflect minority positions, side by side with works by writers from the hegemonic group of Anglo-Canadians would offer a view of Canada that would take more fully into account the multiple interpretations of Canada as a nation and a home while reflecting the pluri-ethnicity of the nation. Whether similar findings of authors rewriting and renegotiating Canadianness and cultural themes while revealing the instability of the notion of home in Canada because of its cultural hybridity would appear in contemporary Anglo-Canadian women's writing poses an interesting question.

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