

MASTERARBEIT

Titel der Masterarbeit

“The Immigrant Experience in
Canadian Second Generation Immigrant Literature”

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 066 844

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Betreuer:

em.o.Univ.Prof. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz

Acknowledgements

My humble thanks go to

Äiti, Isi, Pasi;

Mummi & Ukki, Mummi & Vaari;

the Swobodas;

Lisa, Anda, Izabela, and Federica — it would've been so boring without you;

and the CIG-family.

A special thanks to my supervisor, Professor Zacharasiewicz. I am forever grateful for his wisdom in all matters relating to North American Studies, and his support, guidance and patience during my writing process.

Most of all, I want to thank Andreas.

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1. Introduction

Immigration is a prominent theme all over the world; especially in Canada as it is a country with one of the highest immigrant rates in the world. Only Australia, with its 22%, tops Canada's 18% of the population born in another country (Statistics Canada "Update on Cultural Diversity" 19 online). The world is, as it is often put, 'getting smaller'. The Canadian government¹ has a website and programs for 'advertising' working and living in Canada for foreigners. They give practical information for prospective immigrants about the facts and questions concerning Canadian immigration policies and procedures. Here the internet provides a relevant and easy means for promoting immigration to Canada; a channel that has grown in its influential role only in the past 10 years in a major way. The internet makes reaching the whole world, and informing the world about the possibility of immigration to Canada, far easier than any other medium.

Immigration is nowadays in some parts of the world easier due to international unions and treaties, such as the European Union (EU) or the Schengen Agreement. The EU is a good example of making immigration between EU countries easier: a resident of one EU country does not even need a working permit in order to earn his or her living in another EU country, neither does an EU resident need visas or the like in order to enter other EU countries. Traveling is easier now than it ever used to be; many more people inhabit the globe, and thus immigration is more common now than it ever was. Naturally, then, immigration has also become a major theme of discussion in Canadian society², but also in Canadian literature. Subgenres have emerged, such as Canadian immigrant literature, Canadian ethnic literature, and Canadian minority writing, to name only a few. This has made immigration to—and immigrants in—Canada a relevant topic also in academia. At the Fachtagung Interdisziplinärer Kanadistik³ at the University of Vienna in May 2012, immigration to and immigrants in Canada, and related topics, were under

¹ See *Citizenship and Immigration Canada*. 2012. Government of Canada. 14 May 2012 <<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/index.asp>>.

² Throughout this thesis, the Québécois population is largely excluded in the discussion, as Quebec is not a theme in the books chosen for analysis. The Québécois situation is a theme of its own, not relevant for my purposes.

³ Organized by the Centre for Canada Studies, University of Vienna.

discussion, as scholars from various disciplines came together. These scholars from Austria, Germany and Canada, representing the fields of history, English philology—concentration on North American and Canadian literature—and Roman philology, gave talks under the heading ‘Migration to and Integration in Canada: a Model for Austria?’ Conferences such as this one prove how important it is to maintain a continuous and relevant discussion on immigration and matters—especially problems—related to it.

The reasons for immigration are varied. Often it is the economic situation that leads people to migrate to another country in search of a better life. Reasons for this can be high unemployment in the home country, low salaries, or an unprofitable agricultural state for farmers. Mass migration movements are largely motivated by a search for a better income; the destination countries in the case of mass immigration usually have a better economic status than the country of origin. Moreover, some immigrants find it comforting to immigrate to a country where their compatriots have already established a community; this might make settling easier, on the one hand. On the other hand, however, it could also lead to isolation, if immigrants remain in the immigrant community and never mingle with other people in the larger community. Wars, threats of war, and political instabilities can also result in emigration. In their roughest forms, however, they mostly lead to asylum seeking, which cannot be filed under immigration. Nonetheless, in everyday life, refugees are surely often mixed with, and treated as, immigrants, which makes the line between an immigrant and a refugee in the new home country sometimes hazy. Nonetheless, immigrants are people who leave their home country, and immigrate, voluntarily. In the case of refugees and asylum seekers, the act of leaving is not voluntary but a necessity in order to lead a normal life, or even to stay alive. Alongside refugees and asylum seekers, immigrants are not to be confused with sojourners, international students and workers, or travelers. For these people the time period in a country other than the home country is mainly limited, and the plan is usually not to spend the rest of one’s life in this other country. An immigrant, in contrast, is a person who moves to another country, leaving his or her home country with the intention of staying in this new country a very long period of time—if not the rest of his or her life—often without planning to return to the home country.

Generally, one could divide immigrants into two different groups: people who immigrate in order to start a—often economically—better life in the destination country, as opposed to people immigrating not because of economic or societal reasons but due to personal preference. The latter group is only a fraction in size of the first one. Most immigrants are in search of a better future, in search of a better income and better opportunities for their children. There are also people who immigrate in order to follow family members who have left their home country earlier. These people are, still, largely moved by the same motives as the family they are following. Nonetheless, a smaller group of immigrants are people who immigrate to a country simply because they ‘like’ it, or people who find a spouse in another country and become immigrants because of this. In these two latter cases, the immigrants are often random representatives of one nation in another country, for instance, in the case of Finns in Austria. Moreover, this kind of immigration often happens between countries that have an approximately equal economic standard; Finns do not generally *need* to come to Austria in search of work or vice versa because of the quality of life. The larger immigrant groups mostly consist of people who emigrate from poorer countries to a more wealthy receiving country. This often happens between countries that are geographically close to each other, which would be the case with, for example, Austria and the countries Slovakia, Czech Republic and Serbia, only to name a few. Canada, a country that shares a border only with the United States, still manages to attract immigrants from across the oceans, and to be more accurate, mainly across the Pacific Ocean in the past few years. Despite the difficulties with reaching the country, Canada has always been an interesting goal for immigrants, not the least because of the vast, empty land with space for much more people than inhabit it even now.

Needless to say, there are problems related to the question of immigration and the lives of immigrants. Often it is the prejudice of the receiving society and the fear of losing something of one’s own if foreign people co-inhabit the land that cause problem. Sometimes cultural misunderstandings cause problems between immigrants and the native population. Sometimes, also, it might be the unwillingness to adapt to, and perhaps integrate in, or learn the language of the new home country that lies behind discrepancies. Sometimes, also, immigrants isolate themselves, and create a barrier between

themselves and the surrounding society, which undeniably leads to clashes and problems with the local native population. Sometimes nostalgia emerges for the old 'lost' country, and immigrants attempt to keep the 'old country' traditions alive.

Terminology that appears throughout this thesis will include, for example, integration, adaptation, and isolation.⁴ Other relevant terms related to immigration are 'transnationalism' and 'transculturation'⁵ that have become popular in discussions on immigrants and immigrant literature. Hannes Schweiger, in his article "Borderless Identities? Cultural Mediation in Autobiographical Writing by Immigrants", writes about the problems of categorizing texts as 'immigrant texts':

When reading texts by immigrant writers, it is important to bear in mind the differences within this large and very diverse group of people; critics and readers alike should consider people's varying reasons for emigrating, their social and economic position, as well as the political circumstances. In discussing the effects of migration on an individual's identity, there is the danger of universalizing the experience of immigrant writers, whose social and economic position is in many cases a privileged one. (Schweiger 161)

Of course one must be careful in categorizing authors and their texts. To describe authors as 'Canadian' would also mean to categorize even 'a larger and more diverse group' under one umbrella term. However, one also has to bear in mind that some groupings are inevitable. Moreover, most categorizations are flexible and not exclusive; an author can, for example, easily be a Canadian author, an immigrant author, and thus also a Canadian immigrant author.

The books I have chosen for analysis in this thesis are *The Viking Heart* by Laura Goodman Salverson; *Diamond Grill* by Fred Wah; and *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* by Janice Kulyk Keefer. All these three authors have something in common; they are all children of immigrants to Canada, i.e. second generation immigrants, and all of them were born in Canada. They are

⁴ For detailed definitions of some of these terms and many other terms related to immigration, see for example Berry, John W. and Colette Sabatier. "Acculturation, Discrimination, and Adaptation Among Second Generation Immigrant Youth in Montreal and Paris."

⁵ See for example Levitt, Peggy, and Mary C. Waters, eds. *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, discussing transnationalism in the United States, and Ernst, Jutta, and Brigitte Glaser, eds. *The Canadian Mosaic in the Age of Transnationalism*, considering the Canadian situation.

all documenting stories of the immigrant groups that the authors themselves or their parents belong, or belonged to. Furthermore, all of the books are to a greater or lesser degree (auto)biographical. Besides being second generation immigrant literature, all three texts can be seen as representatives of three different literary 'genres', as at least parts of them represent the following: *The Viking Heart* is Canadian Prairie fiction; *Diamond Grill* can be analyzed as gastronomic literature; *Honey and Ashes* has features of travel writing. For the analysis, I have organized the books by the date of publication: from the oldest to the newest. Moreover, organizing the books according to the time of the original immigration of the characters in the books would result in the same order. In *The Viking Heart* the immigration takes place in 1876; in *Diamond Grill* in 1904; and in *Honey and Ashes* in 1936⁶, leaving a span of thirty years between the times of immigration in each book.

The literature under analysis in this thesis might have also been called 'ethnic literature'. I prefer using the term 'second generation immigrant literature' for two reasons. Firstly, the term 'ethnic' carries with it the implication that anyone but a white (in the Canadian context a WASP⁷) person would be ethnic—or *an* ethnic—although a white person, inevitably, also represents an ethnicity. However, the term 'ethnic' is often used in an unnecessarily exoticizing way. Thus using the term 'ethnic' in the context of this thesis would have also exoticized the literature, the authors, the characters, and the immigrant groups they represent in the books. Secondly, second generation immigrant literature means what it says: literature written by—and possibly about—second generation immigrants in Canada. This terminology is more transparent and straightforward. Ranu Samantrai has discussed the problems of labeling: "We know from the histories of our own academics that nation building and canon formation are two sides of the same coin. How a writer is received and named perhaps tells us more about the intentions of the namer than about the writer himself or herself" (34). One must be very careful in labeling authors and their literature. I prefer the definition 'second generation immigrant' literature for the texts analyzed in this thesis because it is the closest to what the authors represent. Calling them 'ethnic' would also not be entirely

⁶ Referring to Natalia's, Vira's, and Olena's emigration from Ukraine. Tomasz emigrated some years earlier.

⁷ WASP is the common abbreviation for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

correct, as Keefer and Wah did not always see themselves as ethnic or always write 'ethnic literature' during their writing careers. This would have lead to unnecessary labeling of the authors.

A need has risen to differentiate between immigrants who leave their home country as adults, immigrants who emigrate as children, and their offspring. In the introduction to the collection of essays on American second generation transnationalism, the editors Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters suggest that

[s]tudies of the second generation generally focus on the children of immigrants who were born in the United States (the classic second generation) and people who came to the United States as children, usually accompanied by their parents, but who grew up and attended school in this country (the "1.5 generation"). (12)

Thus, as will become evident throughout this thesis, the discussion will include first generation, 1.5 generation, and second generation immigrants. The concentration will be on the immigrant experience of these first, 1.5, and second generation immigrant characters, and how it is portrayed in the chosen literature.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Perspectives on Immigration to Canada

This section will consist of an overview of the general discussion of the history of immigrants in Canada; the specific immigrant groups—Icelandic-, Chinese-, and Ukrainian-Canadian—will also be introduced respectively. Statistics Canada has published several reports on Canadian immigration and immigrants in Canada. Monica Boyd and Michael Vickers write that “[t]he 20th century opened with the arrival of nearly 42,000 immigrants in 1900” (3 online). Only three years later, the number of immigrants was at 400,000; Canada needed the labor force, and immigrants needed the work (Boyd and Vickers 4 online). Altogether, “between 1900 and 1914, more than 2.9 million people entered Canada, nearly four times as many as had arrived in the previous 14-year period” (Boyd and Vickers 3 online). Today, instead of allowing anyone—or only certain nationalities as was the case in the past—to permanently come and start working in Canada, the Canadian government practices a point system in taking in immigrants; prospective immigrants have to acquire enough points by having higher education, language knowledge, etc, in order to gain access to Canada⁸.

Furthermore according to Boyd and Vickers, until the beginning of the twentieth century, most immigrants to Canada came either from the United Kingdom or the United States (4 online). They continue that “during the 1910s and 1920s, the number [of immigrants] born in other European countries began to grow, slowly at first, and then rising to its highest levels in 1961 and 1971” (Boyd and Vickers 4 online). Today, however, the tables are turned, as most “immigrants are most likely to come from Asian countries,” (Statistics Canada “Update” 23 online) this being the result of removing country of origin as a legally fixed hindrance for entering the country (Statistics Canada “Update” 23 online). In 2001 there were over a million Chinese in Canada, totaling 3.5% of the Canadian population, and forming the largest minority group (Statistics Canada “Update” 23 online).

⁸ See *Citizenship and Immigration Canada: Skilled workers and professionals - Who can apply*. by the Government of Canada online.

Douglas R. Francis, Richard Jones and Donald B. Smith suggest that immigrants have influenced many areas of Canadian life (414). The multicultural construct of Canada has also changed the status of the two official languages, English and French. Brian Harrison argues that “[t]he number of people whose mother tongue was neither French nor English rose from 2.8 million in 1971 to 4.7 million in 1996,” and continues that Canada is one of only few countries with such a multiple facet of languages spoken in the country (14, online). He further contrasts the situation of German and Ukrainian as the most common minority languages in 1941, to the situation in 1996 when “Chinese was by far the most common heritage language in Canada” (Harrison, Brian 15 online). Canada is no longer mainly British or French; however, most new immigrants to Canada learn English instead of the second official language –French– which “has contributed to weakening the relative position of Canada’s francophone population” (Francis, Jones and Smith 415).

2.1.1. Icelandic–Canadians⁹

In 1872, the first Icelander emigrated from Iceland to Canada, and the following year the first group of immigrants moved from Iceland to Ontario. The group was well received by the authorities, and also taken care of in the beginning of their stay in Rosseau, Ontario, but some of the immigrants started to have problems with finding work. Nonetheless, some did manage to start cultivating the land and build living quarters. However, many also seemed to have problems with the stretches of land they were given. Jonas Thor suggests that

[t]he high unemployment, low wages, and lack of work were a great disappointment to the Icelanders in 1873. On the train from Quebec, they had been promised plenty of work to carry them through a difficult period until they could settle down on the free land that awaited them. But either this information was false or the circumstances in Ontario had worsened. Also, due to their limited knowledge of English, it is quite possible that Icelandic immigrants often misunderstood those offers. (65)

Thus, the Icelanders appear somewhat unfortunate in their first attempts to settle in Canada. However, Nordic perseverance is not easily put down, and the

⁹ This chapter is—unless otherwise stated—based on Thor, Jonas. *Icelanders in North America: the First Settlers*. Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2002.

Icelanders kept pursuing a new life in the new country. Thor also writes about the Icelandic immigrants, suggesting that “most of them reached Canada without any extra funds and, since the transportation to Ontario and land were free, they naturally grabbed this opportunity” (65). As a result, some headed to the United States, but others remained on the Canadian side and continued looking for sources of income. The work opportunities for the Icelanders being scarce, “[s]ome wrote letters of warning to Iceland, stating that promises made to future immigrants by so-called government agents should not be jumped at without some careful consideration” (Thor 66). Other major problems were caused by illnesses that took their toll on many of the new immigrants in 1874 – many died, especially small children. The Nova Scotian government supported a group of Icelandic immigrants, and this colony of Markland turned out to be more successful than the previous colonies. However, all of the settlers of the Markland colony left it in search of better opportunities after seven to eight years.

Since the previous attempts at settling in Canada had not been very successful, Icelanders decided to look for yet another place for a colony. An area that was of particular interest to the Icelanders was west of Lake Winnipeg. New immigrants from Iceland were also encouraged to move to this new colony, and around 280 people arrived in the new settlement. They wanted to name the first village in the settlement Gimli, Icelandic for ‘paradise’. After the arrival, the Icelanders were faced with the reality since the site was completely unprepared:

New Iceland awaited them just as the advanced party had left it earlier in the summer. No one in Winnipeg knew anything about the nature of the journey downriver to Lake Winnipeg and north to the mouth of the Whitemud River. Plans to buy cattle had to be abandoned and now it became a matter of urgency to obtain provisions sufficient to last until spring. (Thor 84).

As the nights grew colder, the poor housing conditions –in some cases broken tents– caused many Icelanders to fall ill. Due to these difficulties, many left the colony in the spring, and many died. However, many retained their hopes: “Despite this disastrous first winter, several settlers wrote home in the spring and summer, praising the colony site and the fact that they owned their own land, on which they were going to built [sic] a great future. Such letters encouraged friends and relatives to immigrate to New Iceland” (Thor 94). And new people from Iceland did continue to come to Canada. A reason for

emigrating from Iceland was the unpredictable nature: “[i]n 1875, a volcanic eruption in the Dyngju mountains in east-central Iceland had forced hundreds of people off their land” (Thor 97). In the end, there were around 1000 Icelanders in New Iceland. In 1876 a smallpox epidemic broke out. However, despite of all the setbacks, the Icelanders seemed to be quite organized about their settlement. They even made a constitution for New Iceland, and saw a desperate need for an Icelandic newspaper. However, “the newspaper was used mostly to promote very one-sided views in a heated religious controversy. [...] This controversy resulted in complete division and the departure of more than half the settlers from the dream colony of New Iceland” (Thor 112). Moreover, “[b]y the end of 1881, only around 250 people remained in the colony” (Thor 162). Matthiasson suggests that today there are, according to the 2006 census, 88 875 Canadians with Icelandic heritage who are spread over the whole of Canada (online).

2.1.2. Chinese-Canadians¹⁰

The Chinese-Canadians have become an important part of the Canadian society. The numbers of Chinese in Canada are much higher today than in the early years of Chinese immigration. Compared to the 7000 Chinese who lived in Vancouver Island and British Columbia in 1860, in 2006 there were over 1.3 million Chinese-Canadians, forming “the largest ethnic group in Canada, after the English and French” (Chan online). Chinese immigration to Canada started in 1858 in search of gold. For decades, if not a century, Chinese were ill-treated in Canada. The Chinese “laboured under appalling conditions to build the Canadian Pacific Railway” (Chan online). Of the 15 000 Chinese workers, who toiled during the construction work 1880-1885, over 600 died “under adverse working conditions” (Chan online). Still, the Canadian government used to fight hard against accepting Chinese as part of Canadian society—indeed, even against accepting Chinese into the country in the first place. Large numbers of Chinese migrants entered Canada in the early years of the period between 1858 and 1923. This led the Canadian government to decree the ‘head tax’ in 1885, meaning that “Chinese migrants were obligated to pay a \$50 “entry” or

¹⁰ The first two paragraphs in this chapter are cited from: Chan, Anthony B. “Chinese” online.

"head" tax before being admitted into Canada" (Chan online). In 1900 the tax rose to \$100, and in 1903 to \$500. No other immigrant group was under such legislation. In order to stop Chinese immigration completely, "the Chinese Immigration Act was replaced by legislation that virtually suspended Chinese immigration" (Chan online). Only in 1947 was this law abrogated, and Chinese-Canadians also received the right to vote.

It was common for Chinese men to come alone and send money home to support their families. According to Anthony B. Chan, "[i]n 1931, out of a total Chinese population [in Canada] of 46 519, only 3648 were women" (online). After 1947 Chinese immigrants have come largely as whole families. Nowadays, "approximately 70% of Chinese-Canadians still live in Toronto and Vancouver" (Chan online). Furthermore, Chinese-Canadians are more and more highly educated; "[i]n 2001, more than one quarter of Chinese Canadians had earned a university degree" (Chan online). In 2006, "[u]nder much community pressure," (Chan online) the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, apologized for the horrid policies Canada had decreed against the Chinese in Canada, and a "compensation for the head tax of approximately \$20 000 [was] to be paid to survivors or their spouses" (Chan online).

Peter S. Li discusses the impact of Chinese immigrants on Canada during the latter half of the 20th century, more precisely after 1967. This was a group of immigrants who were "better educated, more cosmopolitan, and upwardly mobile" (Li 129). These immigrants and "the growth of the native-born Chinese-Canadian population, helped produce an emergent Chinese middle class, who took up professional, technical, and managerial jobs historically denied the Chinese" (Li 129). Li further suggests that before the 1990s "a new affluent class of Chinese Canadians had emerged; their spending power and investment capacity stimulated a new 'ethnic' consumer market," (129) making it possible for Chinese-Canadians to live in "traditional white neighbourhoods" (Li 129). Thus it seems that the status and welfare of the Chinese in Canada has generally changed for the better in a relatively short time.

2.1.3. Ukrainian–Canadians

Frances Swyripa explains that the “Ukrainian immigration to Canada has occurred in four waves” (627). The first wave took place from 1891 until 1914 and it “brought 170,000 peasants from the Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary (especially Galicia and Bukovyna)” (Swyripa 627). During the second wave, “[a]nother 68,000 individuals arrived in the 1920s” (Swyripa 627). Another 34,000 Ukrainians came to Canada during “[t]he third wave, 1947-54” (Swyripa 627). The fourth wave has still not (at least by the time of publication of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History* in 2004) ended. It started in the 1980s and 1990s as Eastern Europe went through a tumultuous time. Immigrants came mainly from “Poland, thanks to the Solidarity movement; Yugoslavia, dominated by Bosnian refugees; and Ukraine itself, particularly after independence in 1991” (Swyripa 627).

Around the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries, Ukrainian immigration to Canada was supported by the Canadian minister of interior, Sifton, who reportedly stated that “a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born of the soil, whose forefathers had been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife, and a half-dozen children, is good quality” (Francis, Jones and Smith 123) for an immigrant. According to Francis, Jones and Smith, Ukrainians were a popular workforce, as they did not demand a high pay and were hardworking (123). However, their isolated way of life in the new country caused suspicion; they maintained the Ukrainian language and wore the traditional Ukrainian costumes, causing –among the Canadian public the question if “the Galicians could be assimilated” (Francis, Jones and Smith 123). Concerning Ukrainians in Canada today, Swyripa (online) suggests that “Ukrainian Canadians form a mature ethnocultural group that [...] can look forward to renewal through immigration and previously impossible contacts with the homeland” (Swyripa “Ukrainians” online). Nonetheless, Ukrainians in Canada have apparently integrated or even assimilated, as “low membership, decline in traditional religion, intermarriage and language loss have reduced the identifiable Ukrainian Canadian community” (Swyripa “Ukrainians” online), although “since the 1960s the Canadian-born have consciously countered assimilation by reviving interest in their heritage” (Swyripa “Ukrainians” online), as will become apparent in the analysis section of this thesis.

2.1.4. Canadian Immigrant Literature

In the beginning of their article on “Ethnic Literature”, Tamara L. Palmer and Beverly J. Rasporich suggest that ‘ethnic,’ in the Canadian context, refers to “those immigrants who do not belong to Canada’s founding European cultures: the Catholic French and the Protestant Anglo-Celtic,” (Palmer and Rasporich online) and it also refers to the First Nation and Inuit peoples. Shortly afterwards, Palmer and Rasporich propose that the scope of Canadian ethnic literature, then, has to

include émigré writing, both in the nonofficial languages and in translation; literature by writers who perceive themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority and write from this perspective (usually in English or French); and works that deal with immigrant or ethnic experience but are not necessarily written by a member of the group portrayed. (Palmer and Rasporich online)

Thus, one could argue that any Canadian author of any origin other than the two founding cultures can be seen as an ethnic author, if they see themselves as belonging to a minority of this kind, and in their writings deal with topics connected to immigrants or minorities. However, there are authors such as Keefer who did not always want to be labeled as an ethnic author (see Ledohowski 125).

In his article “Multiculturalism and Globalization,” Neil Ten Kortenaar divides Canadian immigrant literature into two groups. According to Kortenaar, the first group consists “of people speaking languages other than English or French” (560) and the second group consists “of people who are not white” (560). Also Kortenaar suggests that “[i]mmigrants in the late nineteenth century and the first sixty years of the twentieth century came predominantly from Southern and Eastern Europe, China and Japan. They were marginalized by many things, but especially by language” (560). Kortenaar states that these immigrants themselves were not likely to produce literature but only their descendants would record the immigrant experience (560-561). He argues that “the first wave of ethnic writing is by people born or at least raised in Canada. For these authors, English, and not their mother tongue was the language in which they wrote most comfortably” (Kortenaar 561). Kortenaar’s “second wave of migrant writers came from the former British and French empires, and have ancestral ties to the South or West Asia or to Africa” (562).

Kortenaar includes Salverson, Wah and Kulyk Keefer in the first group of immigrant writers (561), and, indeed, their parents or grandparents were immigrants that came to Canada. Salverson's mother tongue was, indeed, Icelandic, but she chose to write in English¹¹. However, it is questionable to refer to Keefer and Wah as authors who are not writing in 'their mother tongue,' because for Wah and Keefer English is their mother tongue. It was not necessarily their parents' mother tongue or first language, but these two authors are not able to speak their parents' mother tongues fluently, if at all: Keefer knows some Ukrainian but is "not [...] able to speak proper Ukrainian" (Keefer, *Honey* 258); Wah states that "[he] can't even speak Chinese" (Wah, *Diamond* 39) and that "[he] can only speak English" (Wah, *Diamond* 118). I would therefore argue that perhaps the topics these two authors write about would suit this definition; or that the parents of these authors would be better representatives of this group, but not the authors themselves—at least if the criterion is not writing in one's mother tongue.

Referring to Icelandic-Canadian literature, Daisy Neijmann suggests in her article that between 1873 and 1914, "almost all Icelandic writing [in Canada] was done in Icelandic" ("Icelandic-Canadian" 246). According to Neijmann, Salverson "was the first Icelandic-Canadian author to publish literature in English on a larger scale" ("Icelandic-Canadian" 246). In her article, Neijmann also discusses other established Icelandic-Canadian authors; David Arnason, Kristjana Gunnars and W.D. Valgardson. To turn to the writings of another immigrant group; according to Lee Bennett, the Chinese-Canadian literary tradition is quite a young one, despite the relatively long history of Chinese migration to Canada (1). Bennett suggests that a major reason for this was the way "Chinese Canadians were, for a long time, denied full participation in Canadian society by discriminatory legislation" (1). Other established Chinese-Canadian authors are, for example, Evelyn Lau and Wayson Choy¹². Concerning Ukrainian-Canadian literature, Yar Slavutych suggests in his internet article that during the first surge of Ukrainians to Canada Ukrainian-Canadian literature also came into being. Slavutych writes that "[f]rom modest beginnings this literature developed and flourished in the genres of poetry,

¹¹ See Neijmann: *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters*. 172-173.

¹² See Chan, Anthony B. "Chinese" online.

stories, novels and plays” (Slavutych online). Folklore was the main style in “[t]he first period of Ukrainian writing, 1897-1920,” with themes such as “hardships of pioneering and “the revolutionary flavour of struggles for a better life” (Slavutych online). From 1920 until 1950, “the second period” of Ukrainian-Canadian literature took place and it “broadened thematically and became more artistic” (Slavutych online). Finally, “political immigrants” started the third phase “after WWII” (Slavutych online). Slavutych further suggests that the 1960s began “a revival in Ukrainian literature in Canada” (Slavutych online). Other famous Ukrainian-Canadian writers are, for example, Vera Lysenko and Andrew Suknaski.

2.2. Multiculturalism and the Canadian ‘Mosaic’¹³

The term ‘multiculturalism’ blossomed in the 1960s and was a concept supported by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in Canada. According to Leo Driedger and Jean Burnet, multiculturalism has no less than three meanings; it may “refer to a society that is characterized by ethnic or cultural homogeneity; [...] to an ideal of equality and mutual respect among a population’s ethnic or cultural groups; and [...] to government policy proclaimed by the federal government in 1971 and subsequently by a number of provinces” (Driedger and Burnet online). The legislative “Multiculturalism Policy of Canada was proclaimed in 1971” (Driedger and Burnet online), and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was announced in its revised form in 1988. This was to promote equal rights and status for all inhabitants of Canada. Canada received more immigrants than most other countries at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, in relation to this matter, the size of Canada compared to the size of the population is noteworthy. Canada has vast, uninhabited areas, with most of the population in the south in densely populated relatively restricted areas, leaving most of the country still empty despite the continuous flow of immigrants. The northern parts of Canada are largely unsuitable for permanent use and habitation.

¹³ This paragraph is based on Driedger’s and Burnet’s online article “Multiculturalism” unless otherwise stated.

Driedger and Burnet further contrast the concept of the melting pot—merging all ethnicities and cultures into one, to form a new ethnic identity and culture—to the mosaic where many ethnicities and cultures forming a checkered or colorful whole. The melting pot is mainly a US-term while mosaic is used in the Canadian context. As far as federal organs in Canada are concerned, “there has been a minister responsible for multiculturalism since 1972, and the Canadian Multiculturalism Council and a Multiculturalism Directorate within the Department of the Secretary of State were established in 1973” (Driedger and Burnet online). Driedger and Burnet suggest that multiculturalism has not only been a federal program, but also a feature of the Canadian identity (Driedger and Burnet online). There is not only the ethnic and cultural mosaic, but also the notion of the ‘Vertical Mosaic’ introduced retrospectively by John Porter. According to Frank G. Vallee, Porter’s ‘Vertical Mosaic’ denotes Canada’s “different ethnic, language, regional and religious groupings unequal in status and power” (Vallee online). Furthermore, Vallee suggests that “Porter’s view was that in income, occupation and education, this supposedly beneficial [mosaic] policy worked to the advantage of some ethnic groups and to the disadvantage of others” (Vallee online). Thus, the mosaic presumably was an unprofitable model for organizing or perceiving society, as it produces inequalities among different ethnic groups; this according to Porter and Vallee.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act¹⁴ was proclaimed in 1988 in its revised form. It was, according to Dave De Brou and Bill Waiser, a federal action to “[acknowledge] the right of ethnic groups to preserve and share their cultural heritage and guaranteed equal opportunity for Canadians of all origins” (De Brou and Waiser 656). It was very explicit in the government’s promise of support for all ethnic groups in Canada, stating that the government of Canada would “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;” (qtd. in De Brou and Waiser 657) and furthermore “recognize and promote understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental

¹⁴ See for example De Brou, Dave and Bill Waiser. *Documenting Canada: A History of Modern Canada in Documents*. 656-659.

characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future" (qtd. in De Brou and Waiser 657). These statements were preceded by a statement in the Citizenship Act which claims equal rights for all Canadian citizens; and the Canadian Human Rights Act, which states that it "provides that every individual should have an equal opportunity with other individuals to make the life that the individual is able and wishes to have" (qtd. in De Brou and Waiser 657). It is an ongoing question whether or not the Multiculturalism Act, and the general multiculturalism construct of Canadian society has succeeded.

The Canadian government has spent great amounts of money on its multicultural programs. According to Francis, Jones and Smith, "[b]y 1984 the federal government was providing more than \$23 million annually for its multicultural programme, including aid to day care centres, heritage-language classes, and cultural festivals, and the preparation of histories of major Canadian ethnic groups" (412). Schools have also received financial support and have started to give education in minority languages like Chinese and Ukrainian (Francis, Jones and Smith 412). Moreover, "by the 1980s, half of children enrolled in Toronto public schools, and 40 percent of those in Vancouver's schools, did not have English as their mother tongue" (Francis, Jones and Smith 412). The question has arisen, however, for what purpose and with what cost this support for multiculturalism has been effected. Despite the support toward minority language groups, these languages are giving way to English, as "assimilative trends become more pronounced over time and the retention of non-official languages diminishes sharply, notably between the first and second generations" (Francis, Jones and Smith 414).

2.2.1. Criticism on Multiculturalism

Despite the positive intentions of multiculturalism, the Canadian multiculturalism programs have also been severely criticized. Francis, Jones and Smith argue that "the ethnic communities themselves have questioned whether the right programmes are being supported or whether Ottawa has not preferred short-term, highly visible manifestations of what has been termed 'ethnic exotica'" (412-413). They further suggest that "[o]ther students of

multiculturalism doubt that English-French dualism and ethnocultural pluralism can really be reconciled or that the vastly diverse multicultural third force has the power to assure changes in the traditional bases of Canadian society” (Francis, Jones and Smith 414). Driedger and Burnet also claim that the visible minorities in Canada did not experience the intended positive results of multiculturalism, and these policies “were more closely aligned with long-established ethnic groups of European background,” (Driedger and Burnet online) which in the Canada of today would be an outdated model, as most immigrants come from Asia instead of Europe.

The most famous opponent of multiculturalism in Canada is Neil Bissoondath. He was born in 1955 and raised in Trinidad and Tobago but he has lived in Canada since 1973. Bissoondath has been a published author since 1985, producing short stories, novels and essays, and he also “teaches Creative Writing at Université Laval” in Québec City (Busby online).¹⁵ In 1994 he published his book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, in which he discusses the negative goals and influences of multiculturalism, and the racist undercurrent of the multiculturalism programs. In *Selling Illusions*, Bissoondath argues that

the [multiculturalism] act appears to indulge in several unexamined assumptions: that people, coming here [to Canada] from elsewhere, wish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world, can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influences pale before the exoticism of the foreign. (43)

Bissoondath opposes the concept of any kind of affirmative action. To him, there are “few things more demeaning [...] than to be offered an advantage because of [his] skin colour” (95) because this procedure completely ignores any personal achievements, and leaves the person an object of racial presupposition and, Bissoondath writes, he would thus still “[be] judged by the color of [his] skin” (95). Bissoondath, then, claims that the multiculturalism programs encourage people to perceive “newcomers [to Canada] as exotics” (43), and he would much prefer “accepting that Canadians, because they are of so many colours, are essentially colourless, in the best sense of the word” (73). Multiculturalism continues to be a much debated issue in Canada, the final results of which we will only see in years to come.

¹⁵ Biographical information on Bissoondath from Busby, Brian John. “Neil Bissoondath” online.

2.3. Postcolonialism

For the purposes of this thesis, it is helpful to shortly debate the question whether or not Canada should be included in the postcolonial discussion. Firstly, Canadian authors—especially authors representing minority groups—are often labeled postcolonial authors. Moreover, often the more detailed terms and concepts used in discussing the multicultural aspects of Canadian society, e.g. racism and hybridity, have their origin in the debates of postcolonialism. Lastly, Canada was a colony of the British Commonwealth, although not in the same way as most other colonies. Canadian postcolonialism is discussed in books such as *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*, edited by Laura Moss, and *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, edited by Cynthia Sugars. In the following chapter I will discuss the question of Canadian postcolonialism, and review some answers that have been offered in the works mentioned above –in no way do I attempt to give a definite answer to the question. I will also briefly discuss the phenomenon of racism.

Laura Moss discusses in the article “Is Canada Postcolonial? Introducing the question,” whether or not Canada can be seen as a postcolonial nation. In the postcolonial context, Canada belongs rather to the “invader-settler” (Moss 2) countries “where the process of colonization was predominantly one of immigration and settlement,” (Moss 2) than to the countries “where colonization was more predominantly a process of displacement, impoverishment, sublimation, and even annihilation” (Moss 2). The question of Canada’s postcoloniality is not so easily answered. Postcolonialism might refer to the place of writing, or “to the results of the interaction between imperial culture and indigenous cultural practices” (Moss 2). Furthermore, according to Moss,

postcolonialism may be roughly defined as a concern with a series of issues including: cultural imperialism; emergent nationalism with a nation and between nations; negotiating history and the process of decolonization; hierarchies of power, violence, and oppression; censorship; race and ethnicity; multiculturalism; appropriation of voice; revising the canon and “writing back” to colonial education; and Indigenous languages and “englishes” versus standard English. (4)

She goes on to state that all of these features can be found in Canadian literature, always depending on the approach. In Cynthia Sugars’ collection of articles on the question of Canadian postcolonialism, Linda Hutcheon discusses

the question whether or not Canada can be described as a postcolonial country. More precisely, with respect to the labeling of Canada as a Third World country, Hutcheon claims that she

cannot help feeling that there is something in this that is both trivializing of the Third World experience and exaggerated regarding the (white) Canadian. Of course Canada was politically a colony; but the consequences for white (not Native) writers today of that past are different from those for writers in Africa, India, or the Caribbean. (76)

Hutcheon further argues that instead of referring to the mainly English speaking descendants of the early settlers as postcolonial, a more correct way of using the term 'postcolonial' in the Canadian context would be to use it in relation to the First Nations and Métis writers (76-77).

Neil Besner, in his article "What resides in the question, 'Is Canada Postcolonial?'" , argues that Canada is not only postcolonial but much more. He suggests that stating that Canada is postcolonial would imply "that the story of Canada [would be] only and simply a narrative about its evolution out of a colonial status" (Besner 48) which would not entirely be compatible with Canadian history. Besner continues that "the various kinds of *difference* increasingly manifest in the culture [...] are too vital to be subsumed, hitched together at any post" for Canada to be simply labeled postcolonial (48). More importantly, what, according to Besner, speaks against Canada being a postcolonial nation is the fact that "vital elements of Canada—like, for example, First Nations, or, in another sense, different waves of immigrants in several centuries—were never simply "Canada" and certainly never pre-colonial" (48). Thus the question whether or not Canada is postcolonial remains more or less unanswered; or the possible answer depends highly on the answering party.

2.3.1. Racism¹⁶

Canadians used to think that racism is not a Canadian problem. The idea of human beings belonging to various groups based on their 'race,' was generally accepted by Canadians in the past. The construction of these 'racial' groups was based on "physical traits, or phenotypes" (Walker 527) and the belonging to these groups would then "determine their character, values, and

¹⁶ This paragraph is based on: Walker, James W. ST G. "Racism", unless otherwise stated.

behaviour” (Walker 527). Moreover, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin suggest racism to be “a way of thinking that considers a group’s unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, causal way to psychological or intellectual characteristics, and which on this basis distinguishes between ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ racial groups” (199). According to James W.S.T.G. Walker, the “[r]ace doctrine derives from European imperial expansion and the stratification of the world’s people to serve European power and wealth,” (527) the most famous example of this being slavery. In Canadian society, certain groups of people were not only banned from practicing certain jobs and visiting some “hotels, restaurants, and resorts,” (Walker 527) but also prevented from voting. The oppressed minority groups have, however, always tried to improve their position in Canadian society. This was ineffective before the general Canadian public became aware of the problem; this occurred largely after WWII and the brutality of Nazism, and when Canada realized that it had treated Japanese-Canadians badly during the war. Since the 1950s, the Canadian government has actively worked against racism in Canada. Thus, “[d]istinctions on grounds of ‘race’ are no longer legal, though the legacy of past policies, evident in income statistics and other indicators, has still not been eliminated from life in Canada” (Walker 528). In the analysis section, I will discuss how racism is portrayed in the books, and how the characters experience racism.

Alongside ‘race’ and ‘racism’, another frequent term—especially in discussions on people with diverse backgrounds—stemming from postcolonial studies, is ‘ethnicity’. Nevertheless, the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ should not be used interchangeably. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, “[e]thnicity is a term that has been used increasingly since the 1960s to account for human variation in terms of culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry, rather than the discredited generalizations of race with its assumption of a humanity divided into fixed, genetically determined biological types” (80). Moreover, Susanne Reichl defines ‘ethnicity’ as “the sense of identification of oneself or of others as belonging to a group of people who share (real or putative) common ancestry, language, blood ties, religion, customs, memories, and/or phenotypical features” (158). This would imply that the physical features of ‘race’ can but do not necessarily play a role in one’s construction of ethnicity.

Thus, it could be said that race is more physical a determinant than ethnicity, which tells more about a person's cultural, national background in a rather abstract manner. 'Race' has largely lost its place in the academic and general discussion, as it really has no biological or any other—except for political—evidence. Therefore researchers, anthropologists, and other scholars, have tried to concentrate on using more suitable and more descriptive terms such as 'ethnicity'.

3. Laura Goodman Salverson: *The Viking Heart*

Laura Goodman Salverson was born in 1890 in Winnipeg but “was brought up virtually in an Icelandic world, and absorbed from her parents pride in their heritage and love of their national literature and traditions” (Hopwood ix).¹⁷ Salverson was not highly educated “but she was determined to be a writer” (Hopwood xi). Her parents were immigrants from Iceland (Kambourelis 25). According to Alison Hopwood, in *The Viking Heart* “Laura Goodman Salverson told the story of immigrants who became Canadians without ceasing to be Icelanders, a contribution to our self-image as a people of many origins and cultures, forming a new kind of society, a mosaic — an image of ourselves that is partly true and now accepted” (Hopwood x). Salverson traveled widely in Canada and the US already as a child with her parents, and this continued later on in her life as she married George Salverson, who worked for the railway (New “Salverson” 1003). For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to the author as Salverson instead of the double last name Goodman Salverson.

Salverson wrote several books, including her autobiography *Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter* (1939) (New “Salverson” 1003). She received the Governor General’s Award twice; for *The Dark Weaver* (1937) and *Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter* (1939) (Kambourelis 25). Salverson started to learn English at ten years of age (Kambourelis 25). She was practically rejected by the Icelandic community for taking a lighter stance on writing about Icelanders in Canada than they would have wished (Neijmann *The Icelandic* 184). She chose to write in English, and not in her mother tongue Icelandic, because she wanted Anglo-Canadians to get to know Icelanders and their heritage (Neijmann *The Icelandic* 175-176). This choice too, however, caused criticism among other Icelandic-Canadians (Neijmann *The Icelandic* 184). Nonetheless, *The Viking Heart* has been labeled “the first Canadian ethnic novel in English” (Banita 391). Edward A. McCourt calls the novel a “romantic tale” (78) and suggests that it “is not, as has so often been claimed for it, a serious realistic treatment of Icelandic settlement in Manitoba” (78). He also

¹⁷ Hopwood, Alison. Introduction. *The Viking Heart*. By Laura Goodman Salverson. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975. ix-xiv. The novel was originally published in 1923. It is not clearly indicated in the book, but this is presumably the third edition, slightly altered from the original version, as can be read in the foreword written by Salverson herself.

criticizes the minimizing of the settlers' problems (McCourt 76); a point for criticism also for the Icelandic-Canadians of Salverson's time, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, Smaro Kamboureli claims that Salverson "is considered to be a forerunner of Canadian prairie fiction" (25). I will concentrate my analysis on two major themes of the novel: I will investigate how the characters construct immigrant identities; and in what ways the book represents Canadian Prairie writing.

3.1. Constructing an Immigrant Identity

The immigrant characters in *The Viking Heart* have to re-construct their identity based on their new immigrant status. What their place was in the society and how they saw themselves in the old country, Iceland, would not apply anymore in the new country, Canada. Their children, the second generation immigrants, who have also been born in Canada, have to construct their identity through the old country heritage of their parents, the more or less isolated Icelandic community they live in, but also through Canada and the society that surrounds them. The reader gets to follow the Lindal family during this process of constructing an immigrant identity. With the younger characters it is a question of constructing a second generation immigrant identity. I will discuss both of these issues.

Hartmut Lutz suggests that "Salverson [...] follows the three-generation model of adaptation" (173-174) mainly concentrating on Borga: "At first the protagonist experiences the prairies with romantic enthusiasm as an immense and open but also as a desolately lonely space" (Lutz 174) and later as the characters get to know the land, "it harbours their [Borga's and Bjorn's] home and becomes a place they grow proud of" (Lutz 174). After losing her son in the war, "Borga eventually identifies fully and nationalistically as a Canadian" (Salverson 174) and "concludes that the price for citizenship is paid in blood" (Salverson 174). It is as if Borga had to go through a dramatic—and traumatic—experience before she can fully see Canada as her country, as home. One could also argue that Thor's death is not the only, nor the first, dramatic death in Borga's life that could bind her to Canada; her parents and sister die in Canada during the first years, and her brother even dies on the way to Canada before

they manage to leave Iceland. However, Borga's son Thor represents the future for her: "And Thor, for whom she planned so bright a future, for whom she dreamed and prayed, was all things unto her" (Salverson 177). At the end of *The Viking Heart*, Borga thinks of the sermon at her son's funeral, and finally admits seeing Canada as her home:

This Canada, which had demanded much of them—it was her country. This peace which was hers he had paid for, just as she had paid a heavy price that he might live. [...] "Your son is dead yet liveth, he lives in the life of his country." [...] "In the life of *my* country," she whispered to herself as she went down the stairs. (Salverson 325)

The object of Borga's dreams for the future dies for Canada, and thus binds her to the land. It is almost as if Borga were to adopt Canada as her home when Thor no longer can do so, since for Thor Canada was home. The character of Katrine Hafstein also has to lose a child in order to really root herself to Canada: "For [Katrine] had not yet learned to know that already Canada had laid its tendrils about her heart. That in the very giving of her dead to its keeping, she had bound herself to it irrevocably. She had made in her grief a first bitter payment toward Canadianship for herself and her daughter" (Salverson 136). Through losing the most precious thing for a parent, a child, the characters of Borga and Katrine finally find the sense of belonging and their home in Canada. After the deaths of their sons, Canada, then, perhaps represents the dead sons for these two women, and thus becomes dearer to them.

References to the Icelandic legends imply a strong dependency on cultural awareness with regard to the old country. At the very beginning of Borga's life in Canada, Bjorn writes her a love letter: "You will find much in this country hard to endure but all things have a way of ending and making fools of us all. Be brave. Remember how Hermond sang with the arrow in his breast. It is the way of our fathers. Never forget that the stars that shine here are the same you loved in the homeland" (Salverson 48). The old country and its heritage was all these young immigrants knew. They draw on the old country ways and ideas, and try to reform their identities in the new country with what they know and bring with them from the old country. Later in the novel, Borga hopes that her son Thor would not reject his Icelandic inheritance: "So while her hands moulded deftly the pliant dough into smooth white little rolls, she painted in glowing colors the heroism, the valor and the tragedy of Olaf. For this little

son [Thor] was to walk in the ways of honor and truth and to learn how imperishable is the memory of a great nature” (Salverson 96). This, as previously mentioned, was Borga’s dream, but Thor chooses to fight for *his*¹⁸ country, Canada, and loses his life for the country he sees as home. However, Borga does not wish for Thor not to be a Canadian; “walk in the ways of honor and truth and to learn how imperishable is the memory of a great nature” (Salverson 96) only implies that she wished these highly valued characteristics for her son also. And Thor is never said to have rejected his Icelandic heritage, despite seeing himself as Canadian. I will discuss this matter more in detail later.

The second generation immigrants—the children of immigrants—in the novel grow up in a practically isolated Icelandic community. Charles Taylor, in his book *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition,”* discusses the process of constructing one’s identity:

Thus my discovering my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others. (34)

In *The Viking Heart*, the young second generation immigrants construct their identity through relationships with other characters, who, with only few exceptions, are Icelanders or of Icelandic heritage. Even though their first point of reference while growing up was Iceland and Icelandic traditions, they do not see themselves as simply Icelanders. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Thor, for instance, feels that Canada is his country, not Iceland. This would indeed indicate that, at least, the character of Thor constructs his identity in relation to his surroundings; not only through the Icelandic community in which he grows up, but also through the larger surrounding of Canada. Thus, at least for Thos, these “dialogical relations” (Taylor 34) would stretch further than the immigrant family and other immediate surroundings.

There are crucial differences in the way the first and second generation immigrant characters relate to Iceland and Canada. For Bjorn and Borga, Iceland represents a beloved home, the traditions and heritage of which should

¹⁸ Thor talking about Iceland and Canada: “I am not likely to forget the heritage of my fathers, but I can best prove my Norse blood by honoring this country which is mine” (Salverson 294).

be kept alive. For their children, Iceland is a collection of stories, something the parents long for. Even towards the end of the novel, Borga talks with Thor about his Icelandic heritage, and says “I should not like you to forget your Norse blood, my son. I cannot quite forget my fjords and my mountains” (Salverson 294). For the first generation immigrants, Iceland and its images are much more real and dear than for the second generation. The Icelandic heritage even causes embarrassment for the second generation character Ninna. She is planning to marry a wealthy Anglo-Canadian, and shyly expresses to her sister her wish not to have their peasant father at the wedding, and the motivation behind the wish does not remain hidden for Elizabeth: “I . . . don’t suppose . . . papa can be bothered coming [to the wedding] . . . he’s so busy in springtime.’ [Ninna said] Elizabeth stared at her sister with widening pupils. She was speechless for a time as the knowledge of what Ninna intimated dawned upon her” (Salverson 275). The youngest child, like a prodigal daughter who never returns home, abandons her family and immigrant heritage by marrying into a rich prestigious Anglo-Canadian family, and is thus able to secure the social upward mobility in her life. However, for her Icelandic family Ninna is as good as dead because of this incident (Salverson 277).

For the first generation immigrants Canada represents hard work, as Borga says: “somehow I’ve had little time to think of Canada as a country. It has just been a wilderness . . . a stubborn virgin prairie . . . and then—a farm” (Salverson 294). Canada also represents the hope of a better future that the first generation immigrants plan for their children, and more financial security. For the second generation immigrants Canada represents home, it is where they grew up in and the only place they have experienced as home, as Thor says: “No one place can ever be as dear. This is a great land” (Salverson 293). Dick Harrison’s remark on first and second generation prairie settlers fits very well here: “The long struggle to adjust physically and psychologically to the environment goes on, but successive generations of prairie people have lived with the lingering effects of those initial incongruities between the old culture and the new land” (x). The immigrant life was tough on the first generation immigrants. The first generation immigrants paved the way for the second generation, and by the time the second generation reached adult age, their financial security was more or less certain. In *The Viking Heart*, Borga ponders

on the differences of her life and that of her daughter Ninna's: "Mrs. Lindal thought of herself at Ninna's age, trudging down the frozen lake on her sixty mile trip to see her dying mother" (Salverson 177). Only with Ninna, the 'prodigal daughter', does Borga think thoughts as this one. Thor and Elizabeth are—just as Borga is—hard-working, and can be said to have earned their success, and Borga does not feel resentment against them. Ninna, however, does not share the hard-working disposition of her siblings and parents, and ends up marrying a wealthy, older, Anglo-Canadian in order to be able to lead the luxurious life she desires.

In the past years, the immigrant second generation has become more and more interesting to scholars. John W. Berry from Queen's University, Ontario, and Colette Sabatier from Université Victor Segalen, Bordeaux, have conducted a case study with altogether 718 youth. These young people who took part in the study were second generation immigrants from different countries and minority groups in Paris and Montreal. Berry and Sabatier suggest that

those who involve themselves in both their heritage culture and that of the national society (by way of integration) have the most positive psychological well-being, and are most adjusted in school and in the community; in contrast, those who are minimally involved with either culture (the marginalisation course), are least well-adapted; and those who are primarily oriented towards on [sic], or the other, culture (assimilation or separation) generally fall in between these two adaptation poles. (191-192)

This would indicate that the stronger identity one has in one's 'heritage culture', the better one is integrated *if* one seeks integration and not isolation. Berry and Sabatier conclude with remarks such as; "[f]or all adaptation variables, and in both samples, those youth who are categorised as 'integration' have numerically higher adaptation scores, and in nearly almost all cases, those who are categorised as 'marginalisation' have lower adaptation scores" (205). Furthermore,

[i]dentifying more with one's ethnic group is not conceptually, nor empirically, opposed to identifying with one's national society. The unidimensional approach, where individuals must choose between the two poles of acculturation strategies and cultural identities, does not capture the complexity of how youth work out their new lives in their new societies. (Berry and Sabatier 206)

Thus, a so-called bi-culturalism would indeed be possible for second generation immigrants. The second generation characters of *The Viking Heart* grow up hearing of their Icelandic heritage and continue respecting it. However, they do not continue living the simple farming lifestyle of their parents: Thor becomes a doctor and 'fights' for his country, Canada, in the war; Elizabeth succeeds with an international fashion career; Ninna marries a rich Anglo-Canadian; and Balder becomes an internationally successful violin player. These characters mingle, so to say, with the Anglo-Canadian public by succeeding in fields not unique for Icelandic immigrants. Moreover, the third generation immigrant, Balder's and Elizabeth's daughter, Anna apparently only knows English: "[Mrs. Fjelstad] was teaching the little lady [Anna] to sing the folksongs of Iceland and when the tiny coming prima donna, whose tongue so readily prattled the English, made of them a somewhat weird word jumble" (Salverson 296), indicating that her parents Balder and Elizabeth would, indeed, not speak Icelandic with her, but English. Here, the line of speaking Icelandic seems to be cut, and the heritage culture loses more of its importance. The original heritage language is no longer mastered as the language of the surrounding culture takes its place. Adopting the language of the host country is a strong feature of integration. The fact that this takes place towards the end of the novel implies that with the coming generations perhaps even more features of the 'original' culture are lost as stronger integration and even assimilation takes place.

3.2. Prairie Writing

Salverson's *The Viking Heart* has often been mentioned when discussing prairie writing.¹⁹ Among the several definitions of Canadian prairie writing, firstly, Dick Harrison suggests that "Canadian prairie fiction is about a basically European society spreading itself across a very un-European landscape. It is rooted in that first settlement process in which the pioneer faced two main obstacles: the new land and the old culture" (Harrison, D. x). The uninhabited prairie land was empty and practically without a history for the new immigrants (Harrison, D. ix). Furthermore, the culture, and the psychological and linguistic

¹⁹ See for example Lutz, Hartmut "Race or Place? The Palimpsest of Space in Canadian Prairie Fiction, from Salverson to Cariou", or Jackel, Susan "Prairie Writing".

heritage were as brought over from the old country and had to be adjusted to this new, unfamiliar, “unnamed” (Dick Harrison’s term) country. This, then, applied also to the emergence of the local literature. Dick Harrison argues that it was the landscape that formed also the literary tradition:

The fiction, at least, which has won critical acclaim has been dominated by the hostile face of the plains. The settlers themselves who faced the unnamed country must have felt the promise as well as the threat, and both are reflected in the mass of popular fiction, but we generally accept the development of prairie realism with its preference for the stark and threatening aspect of the plains as the culmination of prairie fiction. (x-xi)

In *The Viking Heart* one can detect a ‘promise—threat’ pattern in the narration. First the prospective immigrants hear of the promise of the new country. Thus they immigrate, but the promise is not fulfilled; threat and tragedy take over instead. Some people fall ill in the Gimli settlement, and Borga’s family dies. Nonetheless the immigrants rely on the good promise of a new and better homeland. In the end they establish their place and find a home in the new country.

Hartmut Lutz compares the literature of European immigrants in the Canadian prairies to a palimpsest. Lutz suggests that these 20th century authors inscribed themselves and the experience of their communities into and onto the ongoing story of the gigantic space of the Canadian Prairies. It is the story of the gradual transformation of space into place, i.e. the material and ideological process of mentally constructing a seemingly untouched and anonymous “new” territory into a specific locale, which the settlers understood to be their own place, becoming their home. (171)

Through this procedure the settlers formed their new identity “as ‘Prairie people’” (Lutz 171). According to Lutz, these immigrants were a highly varied group of people and they did not have much common ground, “especially since European notions of social class kept them apart” (171). Except for the European ‘whiteness’ that they shared, the one major thing that they had in common “was the place itself and their interaction with it” (Lutz 171). Thus the prairies held the settlers together. Also Edward A. McCourt attempts to explain the essence of regional prairie literature, and suggests that anyone writing prairie literature

should be a pictorial artist able to describe accurately the physical features of a characteristic prairie landscape; he should be a poet with power to feel and to re-create imaginatively the particular atmosphere which invests the prairie scene; and lastly, he should be a psychologist

with sufficient knowledge of human nature to be able to understand and describe the influence of the region upon the people who live within its confines. (56)

But, most of all, the author should describe “the effect of particular [...] physical, economic and racial features upon the lives of ordinary men and women,” (McCourt 56) and, furthermore, this literature should “illustrate the influence of a limited and peculiar environment” (McCourt 56). Thus, based on McCourt’s theories, prairie writing could be described as literature formed by and because of the surrounding landscape.

The Viking Heart is set in the western prairie landscape of Canada; near and later in, Winnipeg. The novel indeed presents a prairie setting with its homesteads and grain fields in the Canadian West. The Lindals, the family the novel concentrates on, acquire a homestead and continue farming almost throughout the novel. Whether the novel should be seen as a realistic or a romantic novel has been debated.²⁰ Daisy L. Neijmann suggests in her book that there is a pattern in Salverson’s use of the realistic and romantic styles. According to Neijmann, Salverson “romanticized both her Old World heritage, as it had been passed on to her by her parents, and her hopes for the future of Canada” (*The Icelandic* 186-187). Furthermore, Neijmann argues that Salverson “employed the realistic mode for the descriptions and dramatization of her immigrant present and the immigrant experience in general” (*The Icelandic* 187). Neijmann further suggests that the reason for this might be found in the intended audience(s): Salverson “tried on the one hand to recreate the immigrant suffering and achievements for an audience directly familiar with, while on the other hand she sought to provide her Anglo-Canadian audience with an insight into the immigrant experience” (*The Icelandic* 187). Thus, *The Viking Heart* seems to represent the realism of the prairie life, mixed with the romantic memories, stories, and other references to the old country, but also the romantic expectations of the new world prospects.

With regard to romanticism in the novel, there are instances where the roughness of the prairie life is highlighted, but also instances where the prairie landscape is romanticized; where its beauty is highly emphasized. The shining sun often makes the landscape more beautiful to the narrator’s eye: “Spring had

²⁰ See for example McCourt, Edward A. *The Canadian West in Fiction*; Neijmann Daisy L. *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters*; or Ricou, Laurence *Vertical Man/ Horizontal World*.

laid her gentle fingers upon the land and everywhere the late May sunshine had coaxed forth blade and bud and leaf" (Salverson 59). Here spring has acquired human features, fingers, and the sunshine is coaxing, making the description more personal and more attractive, as it draws on the reader's feelings. Later in the novel, "the rays of the sun smiling down upon it, the field became a gently undulating sea of yellow gold. [Borga] often stepped to the door of an early morning to see this yellow field—this golden store which meant so much to all of them, but most to her" (Salverson 237). Here, the grain on the field is compared to gold; a fitting comparison as this particular field was the source for financing Thor's medical studies, it represents money and future for the Lindals. This might, however, also be covert foreshadowing for the hailstorm that comes and beats this field flat later on in the same chapter. It is as if the beauty of the field is emphasized in order for the disaster to be even more dramatic for the character—and for the reader.

The vast landscape also creates a feeling of unending opportunities. Thor is in awe of the surrounding prairies: "This is a great land. ...These prairies are enthralling. ...Sun-bathed and free and rolling unhindered to the sky. ...They are so wide, so vast—there is room for us all and all our opinions" (Salverson 293-294). This corresponds to Laurence Ricou's theory of the prairie emptiness; Ricou dwells on the importance of the landscape in Canadian prairie writing, and suggests that "[m]an on the prairie, as portrayed in Canadian fiction, is defined especially by two things: exposure, and an awareness of the surrounding emptiness" (ix). According to this definition, again, the vast prairie landscape is a defining feature for prairie people's identity. Ricou also suggests that man "re-creat[es] the human experience" (xi) through "[t]he landscape, and man's relation to it" (xi). Furthermore Ricou suggests, that Canadian prairie fiction "is the record of man's response to the emptiness, to the hollowness so often found at the core of life, to the void beyond, which is death" (xi). Thus, this emptiness was so prominent that it had to come through also in literature produced in and about the Canadian prairies. Thor sees the emptiness and vastness as a positive feature; as room for diversity. It is the only landscape he knows as home; it is where he grew up. His parents' homeland is for Thor just an image based on stories. The stories his parents tell him about their admired former home country, and the 'real' landscape that surrounds him are the

ingredients that he draws from his surroundings and with which he builds his identity. Ricou argues further that “[t]he very obvious contrast of man to land, man’s dramatic vertical presence on an entirely horizontal world, presented itself in an intriguing variety of contexts and was used for remarkably different artistic purposes” (ix). As the upright grain is beaten down to the ground in the destructing hailstorm, Borga’s and Bjorn’s dreams for their son Thor are, for a short time, beaten down with the wheat. Indeed, a few occasions are also mentioned in the novel where the darker side of nature takes its toll on the protagonists and their property. As McCourt suggests, these setbacks are, however, usually overcome quickly and the promise of a good future is always present in the novel (76-77).

The beginning of a new life in Canada is rough for many, and soon costs Borga’s sister’s and parents’ lives, as the conditions in Gimli are worse than unfortunate. The area where Borga’s parents first settle is too wet and the ground is not suitable for farming: “Gimli looked very little like a New Jerusalem to Einar and Gudrun, when [...] they sought in vain a dry spot on which to make a temporary home. [...] The nights were getting bitterly cold and the dampness of the land [...] helped to accentuate the discomforts of the weather” (Salverson 40). Borga’s family dies during the first few years in Canada but the narrator does not spend much time on depicting hers or the other characters’ early years in Canada. Ricou argues that “[s]uch hasty treatment of the years when the community is struggling to establish foundations in a new land suggests the sense of incompleteness and lack of authenticity which characterize the novel” (69). However, from a slightly different angle, Hopwood claims in the preface to *The Viking Heart* that “by the time the book was written the worst was over; the Icelandic community had on the whole prospered, and from being despised as “foreigners” they were becoming a respected part of Manitoba life” (xiii). Thus, for Salverson, the trials of early years of immigration were no longer relevant; more important in the novel are the questions of belonging and of keeping the old country heritage alive, themes that are clearly visible in the novel.

Since the income of most of the characters is dependent on their farms, the weather conditions play a major role in their financial success, floods and hailstorms being a dreaded danger: “Spring had come once again, but not with gentleness. [...] There had been heavy snows in the winter and the whole land

seemed to be threatened by complete inundation. The river could not carry the melting snows fast enough and the ground was still frozen too hard to absorb much of it" (Salverson 141). Later in the year, the fall rains take over the land: "Rain, rain, endless rain! Beating down the grain and swelling the river until finally, like a hungry silver monster, it flung itself over the whole land" (Salverson 142). Here we see how the surrounding nature threatens the families' incomes. This creates a paradoxical pattern: the immigrant characters depend on nature but at the same time it also creates the greatest of all threats to them. But just as the storms come, so does the calm after the storm. Shortly after the hailstorm that beat down the wheat that was supposed to be used to pay for Thor's studies, Borga and Bjorn watch their field having been ruined by the storm:

So they stood through the long five minutes while the proud, beautiful wheat was ripped and torn and beaten to the ground before them. As suddenly as it had come the storm passed. In its wake a fresh cool wind followed. The sun came from behind a cloud and beamed upon the earth as benignant as before. But all through the southwest country the storm had left a ten-mile wide path of destruction. (Salverson 238)

Thus, as suddenly as the destruction comes, it and its effects disappear. Elizabeth, after having worked hard at a tailor shop, has the money to pay for Thor's medical studies. She receives a letter from home, telling that Thor is not able to continue his studies as planned because of the loss of income through the hailstorm (Salverson 245-247). Elizabeth realizes that she can use the money she has earned at Miss Olson's to pay Thor's fees. This confirms McCourt's argument about the hailstorm being "an excuse to play a delightful surprise on the reader" (77), and that the immigrants' "sufferings leave no permanent scars" (76). It also underlines the good-nature of the character Elizabeth; McCourt suggests that she deals with the situation "[i]n a manner reminiscent of the fairy godmother" (McCourt 76). She always puts others before herself—a hint perhaps to the direction of immigrants or minority groups having to hold on to and support each other in order to gain economic increase and societal success.

Another major theme in the novel is that of homesteading. Jane McCracken starts her article on homesteading by defining homesteading as

a late 19th- and early 20th-century phenomenon in which immigrants were attracted to the Canadian West by government advertisements of

"free" land. Under the Dominion Lands Policy, 160 acres cost only \$10, but the homesteader had to build a house, often of log or sod, and cultivate a specified area within 3 years. (McCracken online)

In *The Viking Heart*, the narrator explains that "[t]he government furnished each man about to go upon a homestead with an axe, a grindstone and a stove, if he were unable to make these purchases" (Salverson 40-41). The Lindals are said to have "[taken] a homestead" (Salverson 50) since they already had two small children; until then Borga had worked outside the home. At the homestead Borga could participate in financially supporting the family, and still stay at home with the children. Homesteading was common among immigrants at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries (McCracken online); thus, the act of homesteading in the novel can be seen as a reflection of the recorded historical phenomenon. Paul Voisey suggests that "homesteading is usually associated with the great settlement boom of 1898-1914" (291). The year when the Lindals acquire a homestead is 1891, a few years before the actual boom. The description of the Lindal homestead reads as follows: "The storm-beaten house, some sixteen by twenty feet in dimension, with its pole and mud roof and its gloomy log walls, was the hard-earned home of Bjorn Lindal. He had been in the new settlement, which was spreading from the lake front all along the Icelandic River, only about two years" (Salverson 49). The log house was typical for homesteaders (McCracken online). Typical was also for the homesteaders to settle in areas where friends or family members already lived (Voisey 291). The Lindals live by the Icelandic River, which denotes an Icelandic community. Indeed, all neighbors and friends mentioned in the novel are Icelanders. Whether or not this kind of isolation was voluntary isolation from the Anglo-Canadian community, is unclear. The closely-knit community of Icelanders can function as a reference to the strength of the Norse character in the novel; to show that the Icelanders held together. Furthermore, it is often for practical reasons that immigrants first move to areas where their compatriots live. Ironically, as previously mentioned, the Icelandic-Canadians did not support Salverson despite her being an Icelandic; they rejected her and her writings about Icelanders²¹.

²¹ See page 23 of this thesis.

In conclusion one can ask whether or not *The Viking Heart* fulfills the 'requirements' concerning prairie writing, as suggested by Lutz, Ricou and McCourt? Lutz claims that nothing but the prairie held the immigrants together on the Canadian prairies—true insofar as the Icelanders kept to themselves and did not mix much with other immigrant groups; practically all of the characters in the novel are Icelanders and they live in an Icelandic community. However, in *The Viking Heart*, what holds the immigrant characters together—despite them all living in the prairies—is not the fact that they are all white but they are Icelanders; they all share the same heritage and the same language. Thus it can be stated that in this respect, Lutz's notion of the prairies connecting its inhabitants does not apply to *The Viking Heart*. Ricou discusses the vastness of the prairie emptiness, and the relationship of man with the landscape. Nature and natural phenomena, such as the hailstorm or floods, are indeed presented as something magnificent but also threatening in the novel; as incidents where man is very small and powerless. For example, come the hailstorm, there is nothing Borga and Bjorn can do about losing their crop, except watch it be destroyed by the hail. The relationship to the landscape is a very practical one; without it there is no living, as the people lived from the land by farming and fishing. Lastly, McCourt argues that the author must have artistic skill in depicting the prairies. After several criticisms on *The Viking Heart*²² McCourt himself commends Salverson's abilities to construct an "illusion of reality" (76), and "[writing] with much sympathy and understanding and tenderness and love. The characters are the creatures of romance, but they are vividly drawn" (78). All in all, one can indeed argue that the novel fulfils the 'requirements' set by the selected academics, and represents a proper Canadian prairie novel with an immigrant focus.

²² See McCourt *The Canadian West in Fiction* 75-79.

4. Fred Wah: *Diamond Grill*

Fred Wah was born in 1939 in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. His mother emigrated from Sweden to Canada as a young girl. His father was half Chinese, with also Scots and Irish heritage. Fred Wah's father practically grew up in China; the father was five years old when he left Canada, and 23 years old when he returned. Wah has mainly written poetry; *Diamond Grill* is his thus far only prose work.²³ Although Wah is often labeled an 'ethnic' or an 'Asian/Chinese-Canadian' writer, Susanne Hilf, in her book on Chinese-Canadian literature, mentions two reasons why Wah's *Diamond Grill* is different from most other Chinese-Canadian authors' texts. Firstly, it is a "very personal and subjective" (Hilf 137) text and does not attempt to reach a "collective Chinese-Canadian identity" (Hilf 137). Secondly, Wah is not a new author, although he has not always dealt with his "multicultural background", but only during the latter half of his writing career (Hilf 138). Wah is a renowned author, mostly for his poetry. According to Jirgens, "in the 1960s [...] [Wah] became one of the founding editors of the poetry newsletter Tish" (1178). Tish was a progressive poetry publication that is now also seen as foregrounding Canadian postmodern poetry (Whalen 1116).

Diamond Grill is composed of short texts, stories, non-chronological but all connected as stories from Wah's childhood, youth, and adult life; often taking place at his father's restaurant, the Diamond Grill, and often touching upon Wah's 'hyphenated identity', his mixed ethnic heritage, feelings of belonging, and his love for Chinese food. Wah recounts Chinese food recipes he has heard from family members. Occasionally, these segments of stories are in the form of stream of consciousness or even free verse. In the acknowledgements to *Diamond Grill*, Wah calls his book "a biotext". Wah explains this usage in the collection of critical essays, *Faking It*:

I'm using the term "biotext" as a hedge against the kind of writing I do in *Diamond Grill* being hijacked by ready-made generic expectations, the cachet exuded, at least for me, by those other two terms, autobiography and life writing. As I neared finishing with the text, however, I felt I needed to call the hedge a hedge so I tinted it as "biofiction." (97)

²³ Biographical information on Wah from Jirgens, Karl E. "Wah, Fred." *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*. Ed. William H. New. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002. 1177-1179.

Although Wah heard many of the stories from family members, he also writes that he “must take sole responsibility for this text” (Wah, *Diamond* acknowledgements) and states that the stories “are not true stories but, rather, poses or postures, necessitated, as I hope is clear in the text, by faking it” (Wah, *Diamond* acknowledgements). The focal point of my analysis will be on the hyphenated identity Wah so often refers to in his book, and on how Wah uses references to food, recipes and the restaurant in the book.

4.1. Constructing a ‘Hyphenated’ Identity

For Fred Wah, the hyphen is an important symbol. In *Diamond Grill*, the narrator, Fred, often returns to the hyphen, to its complexities and to the different meanings it represents for the narrator. In a very practical, simplistic sense, the hyphen is the small character between the words Chinese and Canadian. However, the hyphen means so much more, especially for people who have ‘had to’ hyphenate themselves; who have been told they cannot simply call themselves Canadian. In *Diamond Grill*, the hyphen functions as a sign or symbol for the feeling of belonging nowhere or being in-between: in-between two countries, in-between two nationalities, in-between several ethnicities, in-between belonging and not belonging, among other things. Wah writes about the hyphen on several occasions, mainly in connection with his identity. In this chapter, I shall analyze the following aspects: the hyphen as a symbol for distance between China or Chineseness and Canada or Canadianness; the hyphen between several ethnicities; the hyphen signaling the difference between belonging and not belonging; what kind of a role the narrator’s name plays in hyphenating him; and how the kitchen door in the *Diamond Grill* also serves as a hyphen. Wah himself discusses *Diamond Grill* in the collection of essays, *Faking It*. He writes that “[t]he site of this poetics for me, and many other multi-racial and multi-cultural writers, is the hyphen, that marked (or unmarked) space that both binds and divides” (Wah, *Faking* 72) and moreover, “[t]hough the hyphen is in the middle, it is not in the centre” (Wah, *Faking* 72). In *Diamond Grill* the hyphen keeps reappearing and thus does have quite a central role. However, the hyphen should not define the hyphenated people.

The hyphen serves as a symbol for separation between China—or Chineseness—and Canada—or Canadianness. For instance, the hyphen is present, distancing the narrator from young Chinese immigrants, and perhaps also offspring of immigrants. The narrator's father's Chinese restaurant and the status his family has through this in the Chinese community is what unites the narrator to the 'other' Chinese children. But still, exactly because of the hyphen, he is not one of them. The narrator talks about playing basketball in school: "[t]here's a whole bunch of us who've grown up as resident aliens, living in the hyphen. Like the Chinese kids who came over after 1949 couldn't take me into their confidence. I always ended up playing on the other team, against them, because they were foreign and I was white enough to be on the winning team" (Wah, *Diamond* 53). Therefore, this hyphen allows the narrator to choose the side he stands on, but more often it defines that he is not a clear representative of something, of the Chinese, for example, but someone in-between. The narrator is hyphenated—Chinese-Canadian—where the 'real' Chinese are merely Chinese, and the WASP Canadians are simply Canadian. With no hyphenation, there is no need to explain oneself. Fred talks about an old friend Lawrence, who immigrated to Canada from China at a young age:

When Lawrence and I work together, him just over from China, he's a boss's son and I'm a boss's son. His pure Chineseness and my impure Chineseness don't make any difference to us in the cafe. But I've assumed a dull and ambiguous edge of difference in myself; the hyphen always seems to demand negotiation. (Wah, *Diamond* 137)

This hints to the narrator being almost Chinese, but not quite. The fact is he is only 25% Chinese. Being hyphenated, he cannot simply be something; the something that he is, is not a 'pure' representative of one ethnicity, immigrant group or nationality. The narrator feels he needs to explain himself, his background, his ethnicity; perhaps he is ashamed of not being able to claim full Chineseness. The narrator grows up surrounded by the Chinese immigrant culture, and by Chinese immigrants, but he still is not fully one of them, sometimes out of his own choice, but sometimes by exclusion. He cannot speak Chinese which is the dominant language in the kitchen of the Diamond Grill. He works in the restaurant and is the boss's son, but still there is a language barrier separating him from the 'in-group' of the Chinese in the kitchen. He sometimes

fits better in the salon (WASP) side of the restaurant than the (Chinese) kitchen side. I will get back to this towards the end of this chapter.

The narrator Fred is not the only hyphenated character in the book; his father Fred senior is another one. The narrator talks about “the problems my father had from both the Chinese (he’s a half-breed, he’s really a white man, he’s married to a white woman) and the Wasps (he looks Chinese, he can talk Chinese, and he runs the cafe, right?)” (Wah, *Diamond* 39). Cynthia Sugars suggests in her article on *Diamond Grill* that “the son identifies with his father, not as *Chinese*, but as *mixed blood*” (35). Just as the father is given labels by others—others deem him Chinese or white, depending on the situation—also the narrator’s ethnic identity is sometimes decided by others; in school by the teacher, in the schoolyard by classmates, but also through the suspicious attitudes of the Chinese. The narrator and his father thus both experience exclusion from both the Chinese and the Canadians, and are both hyphenated in the eyes of the society regardless of their own feelings of belonging or loyalty.

A major theme in *Diamond Grill* is the question how a person from a mixed ethnic background constructs his or her identity. This question becomes especially complicated when the person in question has several ethnic backgrounds, i.e. parents and grandparents who practically all represent different ethnic groups or nationalities, as is the case with Fred Wah. Wah’s father is half Chinese and half Scots-Irish, his mother is Swedish. He has a Chinese last name, but as the narrator says; “I can’t even speak Chinese my eyes don’t slant and aren’t black my hair’s light brown” (Wah, *Diamond* 39). Still, however, by the majority in his hometown Nelson, he is perceived as a Chinaman. If this is because of his last name, because of his father’s half-Chineseness, or because of the fact that his father was brought up in China even though he was a Canadian citizen, seems to vary.

Because of the narrator’s non-Chinese looks, he is excluded by the Chinese, and seen as an outsider, as a white man. He explains how in Chinatown “[s]ometimes in a store, say, I’m picking up a pair of new kung-fu sandals and the guy checks my Mastercard as I sign and he says Wah! You Chinese? heh heh heh! because he knows I’m not. Physically, I’m racially transpicuous and I’ve come to prefer that mode” (Wah, *Diamond* 136). Thus, he

is oftentimes excluded by the white Canadians as a Chinese person because of his last name and his father's half-Chineseness, but he is also excluded by the Chinese because of his white European ethnic heritage and looks. He is in-between, and can often shuffle between being Asian and a WASP (or rather European if we refer to his ethnic heritage) Canadian. What the narrator strongly opposes, though, is being categorized by others. He recollects this happening already at a young age:

When I was in elementary school we had to fill out a form at the beginning of each year. The first couple of years I was really confused. The problem was the blank after Racial Origin. I thought, well, this is Canada, I'll put down Canadian. But the teacher said no Freddy, you're Chinese, your racial origin is Chinese, that's what your father is. Canadian isn't a racial identity. That's turned out to be true. But I'm not really Chinese either. Nor were some of the other kids in my class *real* Italian, Doukhobor, or British. (Wah, *Diamond* 53)

The mainly white society tried to spoon-feed him from an early age on with the idea that he was not part of the majority because of his father—who himself actually was half Scots-Irish but his few physical Chinese traits and childhood in China were apparently more visible than his actual heritage—so he was categorized as part of a minority, and a rather unwelcome minority at that time. Susanne Hilf suggests that “[w]ith this multiethnic background, Wah does not fit into any well-defined categories” (139). Fred junior was not given the opportunity to form his own ethnic identity himself but society tried to force him into an ethnic mold that would have suited the large white majority.

Despite all this confusion, Sugars claims that “Wah strives to articulate a non-paradoxical vision of identity” (29). Indeed for the narrator all this ‘labeling’ seems to be too much. At one point he says “stop telling me what I’m not, what I can’t join, what I can’t feel or understand. [...] Sometimes I’d rather be left alone” (Wah, *Diamond* 54). It does seem like a big psychological problem not being able to define one’s (ethnic) identity the way one chooses to. Sugars suggests that the narrator’s identity is hybrid: “part Chinese, part Scottish, part Irish, part Swedish, yet situationally ‘Canadian’” (31), and that the narrator searches his ethnic identity through his father; according to Sugars, “the son identifies with his father, not as *Chinese*, but as *mixed blood*” (35). A place where the narrator can be at peace with his mixed ethnicity is his father’s restaurant: “The most grounded Canadian space that the narrator invokes is

that of the Diamond Grill itself. [...] it is here that he can be neither clearly white nor purely Chinese" (Sugars 40). This is perhaps why he feels home there, in the ethnically unclear space is where he belongs, where he does not have to explain himself. Furthermore, Hilf discusses Wah's background and argues that "[d]ue to this multicultural background, his life had been marked by a prevailing sense of unbelonging" (151). It seems that it is not so much the narrator's background as it is other people's and the society's reactions and attitudes toward the narrator, his ethnicity and his background that create problems. It is as if Fred had no real problem with his background but others would, as he states; "[u]ntil Mary McNutter calls me a Chink, I'm not one. That's in elementary school. Later, I don't have to be because I don't look like one. But just then, I'm stunned. I've never thought about it. After that I start to listen, and watch. Some people are different. You can see it. Or hear it" (Wah, *Diamond* 98). Thus, the narrator does not belong to a racialized minority until someone says he does. He is labeled as a representative of one group, and this, again, done by an outsider, not Fred himself.

Fred Wah's family name is closely knit with his heritage, as it is an obvious marker of something 'foreign' in the Canadian context. His Chinese last name seems to cause nothing but amusement among the Chinese. For the WASP Canadians it distances him as 'foreign'. His name marks him as Chinese, but his physical appearance speaks another language. On the one hand, his last name works as an excuse for exclusion by the Canadian majority. On the other hand, the name could bind him to China, but the Chinese tend to exclude him too because he is not Chinese, he cannot speak Chinese and he does not look Chinese. The meaning of one's name can also play a role in forming one's personality. Wah states that his name is often spelled wrong. It could be said that this symbolizes his ethnic identity, how it is often misunderstood. The name could also be a symbol for his ethnicity that is often defined by outsiders, just as his name is mostly misspelled by outsiders. The name 'Wah' is often spelled the way each person writing the name at a given moment seems to perceive the name, and thus it is with his ethnic identity; Wah's surrounding society seems to have its own idea of what or who Fred is supposed to be or represent, without actually paying attention to what Fred himself would prefer to be seen as. The narrator explains that "the junk mail addressed to Fred *Wan*, Fred *Way*, Fred

Wash, Fred *Wag*, Fred *Wan*, Fred *What* is always a semiotic treat. The one that really stopped me in my tracks though was the Christmas card from a tailor in Hong Kong addressed to Fred *Was*” (Wah, *Diamond* 169). All these ‘names’, quite close to the actual name but still far off, giving completely misleading images of the person the name is supposed to represent. Wah also writes about a type of stubbornness of calling another person with the name one believes to fit, despite this name not being the real name:

This Chinese doctor I go to for acupuncture always gets it wrong. He calls me Mah. And I say no, it’s Wah. Then he smiles, takes out his pen and writes my characters on my forearm, sometimes on my back, between the needles, or down my leg (sciatic signature). He says Wah just means overseas Chinese. So I’m just Fred Overseas. (Wah, *Diamond* 166)

Fred is, then, just an “overseas Chinese” person. For the mainland Chinese he certainly is someone from overseas, and probably no longer Chinese. For the Canadian society, his heritage is certainly an overseas one—a Chinese one. Here again, it is an outsider trying to tell the narrator what he is. With respect to his looks and the fact that his relatives look more Chinese than he does, the narrator says that

[t]he name’s all I’ve had to work through. What I usually get at a counter is the anticipatory pause after I spell out H. Is that it? Double U AY AYCH? I thought it might be *Waugh*. What kind of name is that, *Wah*? Chinese I say. I’m part Chinese. And she says, boy you could sure fool me. You don’t look Chinese at all. (Wah, *Diamond* 169)

Fred’s looks make people assume he is a white Anglo-Canadian and, for the most part, this is true. However, the quarter-Chineseness almost always makes its way to the forefront—usually through the name Wah.

The Canadian Institute of Cultural Research has conducted a research on what kind of a role a ‘foreign’—non-Anglophone—name plays in the lives of people with (immediate or more distant) immigrant roots, and why these people decide to change their names into Anglophone ones. Although this study was conducted in 1965, it shows how much a last name influences the way a person sees him- or herself and how other people see that person. Many people changed their name to Anglophone names because they thought it would make their lives and their children’s lives easier. One name changer said “[t]here is much less confusion in spelling, pronouncing, and remembering my name now, and people don’t query the country of my origin” (“The Significance of a Name”,

qtd. in Palmer, Howard 133). Moreover, it was reported that “[a] large portion of the changers said that such considerations of loyalty and pride had been weighed by them in their decision to change their names. However, they stated that ‘practicality and reality’ had won out” (“The Significance of a Name”, qtd. in Palmer, Howard 133). This shows that many felt that they were treated differently with a ‘foreign’ name. In *Diamond Grill* the narrator never mentions even the possibility of changing his Chinese last name into an Anglophone one. This, I would argue, is because for him the name marks his partial Chineseness; it is part of him, part of his personality and identity. If the narrator was called Smith, his partial Chineseness would be invisible for most people, and less visible for the narrator. In this respect, I would argue, the narrator is proud of his mixed ethnic heritage and wants it to show through his Chinese last name.

The final concrete representation of the hyphen I wish to investigate is the kitchen door in the *Diamond Grill*. It is the door that separates the kitchen from the salon of the restaurant. The narrator very overtly even refers to the door as a hyphen: “the wooden slab that swings between the Occident and Orient to break the hush of the whole cafe before first light the rolling gait with which I ride this silence that is a hyphen and the hyphen is the door” (Wah, *Diamond* 16). One could argue that the door that represents the hyphen also represents the narrator; it is in-between two worlds, the Chinese kitchen and the Canadian side where the customers dine. In a similar way the narrator is in-between Canadianness and Chineseness, able to swing between the two because he is “racially transpicuous” (Wah, *Diamond* 136). Hilf argues that

[t]he door which separates the dining room of the café from the kitchen signifies the cultural boundary between China and Canada [...] The kitchen, the Orient, is the world of the Chinese cooks [...] On the other side lies the Occident [...] However, this dualism is not kept up and soon blurs. The door, for instance, is a swinging door with windows and, thus, does not really separate the two spaces but rather connects them. (149-150)

Therefore, the hyphen would connect and combine the different ethnicities in the narrator into a whole; it would connect the Canadianness and the Chineseness together, rather than separating them. Perhaps it does both, separate and connect. Also Fred’s hyphenated state both separates and connects. On the one hand he can choose to be either Chinese or Canadian,

depending on the situation. On the other hand, he is often excluded by the WASP Canadians as Chinese, and by the Chinese as white Canadian. Fred ends up swinging between these ethnicities²⁴. Interestingly, the narrator finds pleasure in kicking the door open with his foot (see Wah, *Diamond* 21). If the door is seen as the hyphen in the narrator's ethnic identity, why does the narrator enjoy kicking it? I suggest that these kicks are kicks against the general idea of the hyphen, of being in-between in a way that one has to choose between the one or the other ethnicity, instead of being able to subscribe to both, if one chooses to. These kicks are not kicks against representing two ethnicities or having an ethnically mixed background. They are kicks against being denied Canadianness because of immigrant background, and against being denied the right to decide and define one's own identity oneself. For the narrator the hyphen is unnecessary, as it only marks distance and differentiation, and his unbelonging to certain people groups. The narrator does not care about this kind of ethnic labeling; he kicks the hyphen that marks distance, differentiation, and ethnic labeling.

4.2. The Role of Food and the Restaurant

Food plays a major role in *Diamond Grill*: Fred spends much of his childhood in his father's restaurant, and as an adult he enjoys cooking Chinese dishes—much of them familiar to him from his childhood. In the following chapter I will discuss the symbolic functions of food and the restaurant, Diamond Grill, in the book, integrating secondary sources on this topic; on culinary literature in general and specifically on Wah's *Diamond Grill*. In the article "One Reader's Digest: Toward a Gastronomic Theory of Literature", Brad Kessler writes about the role of food in literature, and points out that "many of the greatest novels did, indeed, have a banquet, a breakfast, or a dinner in the first few pages of the book" (150 online). He continues by stating that food has always played an important role in literature: "there've always been authors who 'reflected' quite a good deal of lunch and dinner, breakfast, and dessert. Rabelais, Flaubert, Dumas spring immediately to mind (Dumas even wrote his

²⁴ Fred talks about both of these issues in one paragraph on page 53 in *Diamond Grill*: about being able to 'act white' when it profited him and the exclusion he experienced from the Chinese.

own *Dictionnaire du Cuisine*). But the gastrealists weren't limited to the French" (Kessler 149 online). Indeed, the Canadian Wah, with a very mixed ethnic ancestry, has given food a major role in *Diamond Grill*. Food is not a feature restricted to novels. As Susanne Reichl argues,

the idea of "national" food has long had a unifying power and an almost mythical status in the construction of a sense of nationality. For immigrants, too, the significance of food and drink in their construction of a 'home away from home' seems to be crucial and is evidenced in poetry [...], in fiction [...] as well as in autobiography. (177-178 online)

Wah's book could be included in all three genres Reichl lists. Wah's text is fiction, but with an autobiographical aspect, and it also has poetic sections. Moreover, the role of food can indeed be seen as a 'home away from home,' as the narrator has problems fitting in the labels that he has been given in Canadian society, but it is the only place he has known as 'home'. It is as if Fred cooks his own 'national food' the way he pleases. The Chinese dishes are perhaps an escape from expectations and definitions set by outsiders. Cooking is a personal activity for the narrator. People or the society at large can try to tell him what his ethnicity should be, but they cannot tell him how to live out his own idea of ethnicity by and through cooking.

Scholars have tried to find explanations to the occurrence of food in literature. Firstly, perhaps one reason why food is included in fiction in the first place, could be the fact that "[f]ood in fiction engages all the reader's senses (taste, touch, feel, sight, and smell)" (Kessler 150-151 online). Reading about food makes the reading experience a wholesome, even bodily, sensation. However, Kessler goes further and argues that

the real link between food and literature is that they both satisfy, not only an appetite, but a *hunger*. A hunger for words. A hunger for the lives of others, a hunger to transcend our own small selves and enter the bodies of others—different from us, yet the same—across the divide of centuries or class or culture or gender or race. (165 online)

In Fred's case this hunger could also be hunger for ethnic identity, or more precisely for the freedom to define one's own ethnic identity. Or even hunger for colorlessness²⁵; that one's ethnicity or the way one looks would in no way be a negative attribute or a reason for any kind of societal restrictions or labeling.

²⁵ As Bissoondath suggests: Canadians are, in their variety of colors, colorless (Bissoondath 73), discussed on page 18 of this thesis.

Perhaps Fred satisfies his hunger for freedom of ethnicity through cooking the dishes he pleases; it is Fred himself who decides what he cooks and eats. Secondly, in an introductory text on *The CanLit Cookbook*, Margaret Atwood also ponders on the reasons for including food in literature:

'You are what you eat' means one thing to a nutritionist, another to a novelist. Standard cookbooks put various foods in because they taste good, are easy or interesting to cook, or are good for you; authors put them in because they reveal character, slimy as well as delectable, or provide metaphors or jumping-off points into the ineffable or the inferno. (Atwood 52)

According to this excerpt, it would be improbable for foods to appear in literature simply because the narrator, or even the author, likes these foods or simply finds them fitting for a particular text. According to the view presented above, one could argue that everything in literary texts carries a symbolic meaning. Do, then, the recipes in *Diamond Grill* "reveal character"? If they do, they would reveal a Chinese character: all recipes are Chinese. They could also reveal a character who is passionate about China. Oftentimes the recipes are also connected to a childhood memory, making the dishes tools for nostalgia as they take Fred back to his childhood through smells and tastes. Atwood further mentions the fundamental nature of the act of eating: "Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk" (53). Eating is such a profound feature of our humanness that it crosses borders of language, nationality, ethnicity, skin color, class and gender. Everybody eats. Perhaps, for Fred, his Chineseness is almost unconscious, as it comes to the fore in the form of food; craving for Chinese food, enjoying Chinese food. Motivated by these urges, Fred passionately cooks Chinese food. Fred cannot speak Chinese, and does not need to: he can cook Chinese and eat Chinese, and live out his Chineseness through the Chinese food he cooks, eats and writes about.

Wah has included recipes and many tastes from his childhood in *Diamond Grill*. Rosalia Baena suggests that "[t]hese recipes are part of Wah's family life, and especially significant as they reference family connections and special moments, such as leaving home" (Baena online). The recipes also function as a binding, familial tool, as the narrator "consistently associates each recipe to a family member" (Baena online). In fact, not *all* recipes are associated

with a family member: for example, on page 2 the cook Shu's 'mixed grill' is discussed. For the most part, however, Baena is right; for example Granny Wah made 'foong cheng' (Wah, *Diamond* 9), brother Donnie made 'gim jim' (Wah, *Diamond* 129), and Fred senior teaches Fred junior to cook rice (Wah, *Diamond* 75), to name a few dishes discussed in the book. It is almost as if each recipe were, to the narrator, the representative of a family member.

Interestingly, in the book there are no Swedish recipes included, although Wah, in fact, is half Swedish and 'only' a quarter Chinese. Granted, Chinese food is surely closer to him because of his father's restaurant as the title of the book already suggests, but the absence of Swedish food in contrast to the seeming omnipresence of Chinese food is striking. I would argue that the absence of Swedish recipes, and the presence of Chinese recipes strengthen the point of the narrator's identification with the Chinese side of his family, rather than with the Swedish side. Baena suggests that there is a clear contrast between the Chinese and Swedish sides of the family: "Foong cheng becomes a distinguishing dish for the family. This peaceful description of a family gathering contrasts harshly with the preceding section where Granny Erikson's [sic] monologue articulates her hatred for [the] Chinese and her anger that one of them is going to marry her daughter" (Baena online). This, then, could explain why the narrator more or less ignores the Swedish side of the family and Swedish foodstuffs. The narrator leans more towards his Chineseness than his Swedishness (even though he is half Swedish), since it was the Swedish side that disapproved of the Chinese side; Coreen married 'a chinaman' and her family rejected her because of this, not vice versa. Furthermore, Baena notes that "[n]o food traditions or memorable meals suggest that few (and sad) memories are attached to that [Swedish] side of the family" (Baena online). Fred even says "[s]ometimes [his] mother's parents talk Swedish in front of [him] but they only use it to argue" (Wah, *Diamond* 61). Even the Swedish language is thus represented in a negative light. This ignoring—and perhaps even rejecting—of the Swedish side can be seen as a reaction to or mirroring of the original attitudes of the Swedish side towards the Chinese side of the family, and through this also towards the Chinese 'side' of the narrator's identity. A similar neglect can be detected in the narrator's attitude toward his ethnicity. The narrator is passionate about the Chinese dishes he talks about, but "the

intense delight at food and the joyful evocation of these memories contrast strikingly with Wah's ambivalence regarding his mixed racial background" (Baena online). What exactly his ethnicity could, would or should be is not of importance to the narrator. The narrator would perhaps rather leave his ethnicity be, just as he leaves the Swedish side be.

It seems that in cooking the dishes the narrator chooses to cook, he can live out his ethnic identity the way he chooses to. It is an area where he can draw influences from many directions but in the end it is the narrator who cooks the meals. Just as Sidney W. Mintz suggests, "[n]ational cuisine, then – whatever else it may be – can represent the nation in a manner that the national language does not" (26). Thus, I would argue that the narrator's 'personal cuisine' represents his ethnicity in a way that labels cannot. Moreover, as Fred cannot speak Chinese, his cooking represents his identification with China instead of knowing the language. The narrator also abstracts his cooking as he states: "Cook your silence, but don't let it simmer" (Wah, *Diamond* 92). It is better to cook the issues that are troublesome, to deal with them and move on, than to let them simmer until they burn and turn inedible. Hilf suggests that, with regard to the Chinese dishes that are prepared in the book, Wah's concentration is not on the foreign names of the dishes, but more "on their smell and taste, i.e., on very individual and subjective experiences" (149). Indeed, on some occasions, the narrator does not even know the names of the foods he is talking about. Thus the focal point is more, as Hilf stated, on the narrator's personal relationship to certain Chinese dishes rather than, for example, a relationship between a national dish and a people. Just as the narrator's questions of his ethnicity are personal, so is his relationship to the dishes he discusses.

Some tastes are losing their importance from generation to generation. Grampa Wah enjoys 'wet rice,' the younger generations less so: "Boiled burnt brown crust in the rice pot looks sludgy but smells sweet. Dad has it once in a while but not often. I try it a couple of times but don't like it. Going out of us. Gone now, from him, to him, to me" (Wah, *Diamond* 74). Here, the wet rice perhaps symbolizes Chineseness which is losing its grip. Grampa Wah speaks Chinese, grew up in China, and most likely would call himself Chinese. Fred senior was born in Canada, grew up in China, speaks Chinese and is familiar

with the Chinese culture. However, Fred senior is already in the gap between Canadianness and Chineseness. Fred junior, the narrator, is half Swedish, one third Chinese and does not speak Chinese. This something that is “[g]oing out of us” (Wah, *Diamond* 74) can thus be seen as Chineseness losing its grip with each generation after immigration.

An ingredient that Wah returns to a few times is ginger. This Asian root seems to be more than just something to eat for Wah. He looks back to his childhood memories of ginger and writes that

[d]ad doesn’t cook much with ginger but whenever I accidentally bite into a piece of ginger root in the beef and greens, I make a face and put it aside. This makes him mad, not because he doesn’t think ginger is bitter but because I’ve offended his pride in the food he prepares for us. Ginger becomes the site of an implicit racial qualification. (Wah, *Diamond* 11)

Fred’s father takes pride in the *Chinese* food he cooks his children; it is as if he was preparing their Chineseness in the form of food—as it is the strongest link to Chineseness for the children because they do not know the language and are generally seen as ‘white’. The final sentence hints that, for the narrator and his father, ginger symbolizes something more than just a spicy taste. It is as if by rejecting the pure taste of ginger, and by spitting it out, the narrator spits out his Chinese heritage; it is too strong, too pungent, and maybe too different from what other—white—Canadians could handle. Conversely, by rejecting the pureness of ginger, he does not ‘qualify’ as a real Chinaman; the strong taste forces a strong reaction, symbolizing the distance from the ‘real’ Chinese. His father also finds ginger bitter, but he would not show it to ‘offend someone’s pride’. The narrator does not, however, claim not to enjoy ginger in food. He says: “This knurled suffix of gradated foreignicity, gyna gendered and warped up tighter than a Persian rug-knot, hardly explains how ginger’s almost nicer than being born—but that’s just taste” (Wah, *Diamond* 11). Just as with garlic that he likes to use in cooking, but still tries to hide the smell in case people come to visit²⁶. Fred enjoys the tastes but does not seem to come to terms with them. The bits of ginger make him pull faces; the smell of garlic makes him ashamed.

²⁶ See Wah, *Diamond* 47.

Different foodstuffs often bring the narrator back to his childhood, or bring memories to his mind. Hilt mentions that “distinct smells and tastes” (148) in the book “spur a certain memory, they trigger associations, literally bringing back the past” (148). Indeed, the narrator talks about ‘lo bok,’ and how “[f]or years after leaving home I’ve had a craving for some Chinese food taste that I haven’t been able to pin down. An absence that gnaws at sensation and memory. An undefined taste, not in the mouth but down some blind alley of the mind” (Wah, *Diamond* 67). Here the narrator attaches a taste to a memory; he makes them an inseparable pair. Tastes and smells work for the memory, and vice versa. Kessler even calls “[s]mell, the librarian of the senses” (157 online) and suggests that it “stores in its stacks every odor we’ve ever sniffed, and leaves it there, preserved, unawakened, until we have cause to experience it again” (Kessler 157 online). As the narrator re-encounters lo bok, the taste he has remembered receives a physical form, too. He had not been able to define what he was craving—it was almost an unconscious desire. When he finally found out what taste he was missing, “[he] knew instantly [he] had found a lost taste” (Wah, *Diamond* 67). The taste was lost but not the memory, and the memory helped him find the taste.

Much of the narration concentrates on the Diamond Grill, and the narrator also spends much of his time in the restaurant; it is a physically and psychologically important place for the narrator. According to Sugars, the restaurant, “[w]hile evoked as a site of nostalgia, it is also the space where his ambivalences are most visible to him, for it is here that he can be neither clearly white nor purely Chinese. Even if the Grill should hold promise as a kind of deracialized haven, it is not one, for its boundaries are always intruded upon” (40). Sugars argues that in the café he is always the foreigner but also in the kitchen he is an outsider because he does not speak Chinese (Sugars 40). Sugars discusses the languagelessness the narrator because he cannot speak the language spoken in the kitchen—Chinese (40); Fred is practically languageless inside the walls of the Diamond Grill kitchen. Sugars also discusses the Grill as a site for alienation and familiarity for the narrator: “The Diamond Grill thus functions as a transitional zone of multiple and shifting diasporic identities, marked by both alienation — he does not speak Chinese nor is he sufficiently “white” — and familiarity” (42). It seems the restaurant is

the place he feels at home, especially in the kitchen, although he cannot understand the language of the 'inside group' in the kitchen, but is still very familiar with the place.

'Mixed grill' is the first recipe the narrator refers to in the book and calls it a "typical improvised imitation of Empire cuisine" (Wah, *Diamond* 2). Talking about Fred senior, Sugars shortly points out "the "mixed grill" of Canadian society will provide the opportunity through which he can escape "the fragmented diaspora" (20)" (Sugars 36). This reference to the Canadian society as a "mixed grill" is a fitting one. Just as the dish has been influenced by different culinary traditions, and now serves as "improvised imitation of Empire cuisine" (Wah, *Diamond* 2), so has Canadian society been influenced by many different ethnicities, cultural traditions, peoples, to name a few. Furthermore, one can look at the situation the other way round, too: immigrants coming to Canada are influenced by their new surroundings, new host culture, dominant language, among other things. The 'mixed grill' plate can represent the complexity of immigrant experience. When immigrants live abroad long enough, their experience of national, or also ethnic, identity changes its form and gets a different meaning; different than for people who live in one country their whole life. The mixed grill plate can symbolize all these, if not more.

5. Janice Kulyk Keefer: *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*

Janice Kulyk Keefer was born in 1952 in Toronto. She received her BA at the University of Toronto in 1974, but her MA (1976) and her DPhil (1983) she received at the University of Sussex, England. Her writings include books, like *Honey and Ashes*, poetry and short stories. Furthermore, she has written literary criticism. Currently she is a professor at the University of Guelph.²⁷ For simplicity's sake, I will refer to the author as Keefer instead of the double last name Kulyk Keefer.

Honey and Ashes was published in 1998 and is partly autobiographical—mainly biographical, based on the life stories of Keefer's maternal grandparents, her mother and aunt, and also on Keefer's own life. The first chapter of the book starts with a mental journey to her grandparents' youth; to the time when Keefer's grandmother Olena met Keefer's grandfather Tomasz, and moves on to Keefer's mother's and aunt's childhood. The second chapter depicts Keefer's grandmother's, mother's and aunt's journey to Canada. Her grandfather had emigrated some years earlier, and now it was time for the family to follow. The first few years in Canada are also depicted in this chapter. The third chapter includes a historical recap of the situation in Galicia at the time of Keefer's grandparents' youth, and the situation between Poland and Ukraine, intertwined with questions about Keefer's grandparents—especially about her grandfather Tomasz. The second half of this chapter discusses the problematic relationship between Jews and Ukrainians; a hostility that, for Keefer, seems to be difficult to understand. The fourth and final chapter portrays Keefer's journey to her grandparents' 'old home' in Ukraine. In the epilogue of *Honey and Ashes*, Keefer shortly ponders whether or not she found what she was looking for during her journey in Eastern Europe. In the prologue of *Honey and Ashes*, Keefer introduces the book and writes that it

is, more than anything, a story of family. I do not claim to know or tell The Truth about my family; what I am doing is sieving memory and retelling the stories that make memory material, and public. The difference between what I was told and what I heard; what memory hides and what imagination discloses—all this is part of the book I have written. (5)

²⁷ This paragraph is based on New, William H. "Keefer, Janice Kulyk."

Keefer also acknowledges that the stories might not be entirely truthful, and that “these stories [she heard from her family and friends of the family], in being translated from one language to another, have had some of their most important resonances altered or extinguished” (Keefer, *Honey* 6). Thus, also, Wah’s view about subjectivity in his writing ties in with Keefer’s notion of not claiming to tell the ultimate truth in her stories.

In her article “‘Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction”, Keefer writes about her attitudes towards labeling literature ‘ethnic’ and how she is against this kind of categorization “to be pigeonholed as an ethnic writer, someone whose work would only be of interest to a small community of “like-blooded” readers, a community that would also be harshly critical of anything it deemed disloyal or counterdiscursive to the master narrative it had constructed for and of itself” (Keefer, “Coming” 89). This comment emphasizes Keefer’s position as an author in Canada because, interestingly, she “began her career not wanting to be considered ethnic” but later on “changed her attitude” and started touching upon issues like ethnicity (Ledohowski 125). The first half of the analysis shall concentrate on how the immigrant heritage is discussed in the book. As traveling to Ukraine is one of the main themes of the book, I will dedicate the second half of the analysis to travel writing.

5.1. Immigrant Heritage

The questions where one comes from, where one belongs, and how these two are influenced by one another, are major themes in *Honey and Ashes*. Janice talks about her past and her Ukrainian²⁸ ancestors and their relation to her and their influence on the construction of her identity. She often feels lost between the two national identities—Ukrainian and Canadian—and feels a burden because of her uncertainty regarding her own (national) identity.

Janice’s immigrant heritage has a major influence on her life and on her perception of herself. There is a certain sense of indecision in Janice’s relationship with Ukraine and with Canada. Her grandparents are Ukrainian but her own parents have already spent most of their lives in Canada and do not

²⁸ Janice refers to herself by saying “I grew up a Ukrainian-Canadian with a tread of Polishness in her” (Keefer, *Honey* 7) but since most of the time she refers to Ukraine, so shall I.

speak Ukrainian with their children later on. How they see themselves, and with what national identity—or identities—they identify with, is unclear. Janice and her siblings, on the other hand, were born and raised in Canada but it is mentioned that only her brother can speak “his parents’ mother tongue” (Keefer, *Honey* 258), whereas Janice cannot “speak proper Ukrainian” (Keefer, *Honey* 258). This second generation, then, is already losing the ‘heritage’ language. To go even further, Keefer herself says that her ‘third generation immigrant’ sons identify themselves as completely Canadian²⁹. Thus, similar to the development of the immigrants in *The Viking Heart*, also in *Honey and Ashes* the characters belonging to ethnic minorities become more and more Canadianized with each generation³⁰.

In *Honey and Ashes*, Janice often expresses the problem she feels in subscribing to an ethnic or national identity. She does not feel properly labeled as a Canadian but is also not sure if she really is Ukrainian either. For example, on her journey to Ukraine, she listens to a street singer in L’viv, and is moved to tears but cannot sing with her:

Listening to her singing, I find my throat tighten, tears prickling my eyes. Several of the bystanders join in. My mouth opens but no sound comes out. I can’t sing these patriotic songs, anymore than I can sing, “O Canada!” at home. This public display of loyalty to a nation, a homeland, a history, this simple act of belonging, is something I’ve never been able to perform. (Keefer, *Honey* 258)

The interesting point here is that still, despite all supposed hesitation and discussion about not knowing where her home is, she continuously refers to her place of residence in Canada as ‘home’. In contrast, sometimes she also refers to Ukraine as home: “It’s not just the rudeness of the man at the Ukrainian consulate [...] It’s his having locked me out of that strange, ungiving place I so improbably call home” (Keefer, *Honey* 225). Thus, Janice ends up calling both places home, depending on the context. It is as if she ideally saw Ukraine as her home, as the place where she originally comes from, however being unable to escape the reality of Canada actually being her real and proper home. This Keefer even verifies in the acknowledgements of *Honey and Ashes*, as she

²⁹ See Keefer, *Honey* 237, or Keefer “‘Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction” (89).

³⁰ Compare with the discussion on a similar phenomenon in *The Viking Heart*, page 29 of this thesis.

clearly differentiates between "the Old Place and [...] home" (Keefer, *Honey* 332). There is also a dictionary definition of home within the text:

Home, as the dictionary defines it, "a fixed dwelling-place, one's habitual or proper abode. The place of one's dwelling and nurturing, also with reference to the grave or future state. A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections centre, or where one finds rest, refuge or satisfaction. One's own country, one's native land, the place where one's ancestors dwelt. (Keefer, *Honey* 328)

Her "fixed dwelling place" (Keefer, *Honey* 332) is Canada, but "the place where [her] ancestors dwelt" (Keefer, *Honey* 332) is Ukraine. Therefore, this questioning of where her home is seems slightly paradoxical. On the one hand she does not perceive Canada as her home country, and feels that she does not belong to or come from there. On the other hand, more often she calls Canada home, lives there, goes to 'visit' Ukraine only for a week or two, and the language she speaks, communicates with and is fluent in is English, not Ukrainian. It is almost as if she were hesitant to accept Canada as her home—as if she were fighting against her Canadianness. Moreover, for Janice, Ukrainianness and Canadianness are battling against one another:

For however Canadian I know myself to be, I feel defined in some way by this other country I've hardly set foot in, whose language I can barely speak. It's as though I looked down on a bright day to discover I had two different shadows, leaning in opposite directions, touching only at the base. Neither sketches my true shape. They will never merge into one. But I know that both will always be part of me, and that this journey I'm about to undertake is another way of looking for my shadows. (Keefer, *Honey* 217)

She claims her Ukrainianness and Canadianness would never become one, and that neither of these national identities fully represents her. However, the results of the case study conducted by Berry and Sabatier³¹ would also be applicable to *Honey and Ashes*. In vain does Janice look for a single ethnic or national identity with which to identify. According to Berry and Sabatier, one does not have to identify with one ethnic group and to reject the national group; one can indeed identify with both (206). Thus, her sense of Canadianness would in fact not rule out her experience of Ukrainianness; she could embrace both if she chose to.

³¹ Discussed with reference to *The Viking Heart* on page 28 of this thesis.

Language, in *Honey and Ashes*, can be seen as a symbol for the differentiation between the Ukrainian and Canadian identities. Janice often mentions her regrets about not being fluent in Ukrainian. I would argue, however, that this aspect is also slightly paradoxical. To continue the citation referred to on the previous page:

This public display of loyalty to a nation, a homeland, a history, this simple act of belonging, is something I've never been able to perform. It has to do with how fraught and complex the worlds of nation and homeland are—how impossible to contain them in a few bars of music, a banner of words. It has to do with that most complicated world of all to me: language. (Keefer, *Honey* 258)

Yet language is the tool she works with; she is an English professor and an author of several books. As mentioned before, Janice regrets not being fluent in Ukrainian (Keefer, *Honey* 258), as opposed to her brother who has been able to maintain his knowledge of the language (Keefer, *Honey* 258). Still, the questions concerning language seem to bother her greatly. As she is interviewing John Matusak, who was Tomasz's friend since the early Canada years, about her grandfather's past, she says: "I feel uncomfortable, I feel wrong, making this man speak to me in a language not his own; although my mother addresses him in Ukrainian, he insists on using English" (Keefer, *Honey* 66) when, in fact, she is not 'making' him speak in English; Matusak himself 'insists' on speaking English. It is as if Janice would not accept other people's choice of actually preferring, for example, the 'new country' language over the heritage language. In Janice's eyes, Matusak should speak in his mother tongue, Ukrainian, and because he—for whatever reasons—chooses not to, she feels she forces him to use a language other than his mother tongue, even if he preferred to do so. It is their choice, not hers, but it is as if she assumes all immigrants to use their mother tongue rather than the language of their current home country. She perhaps feels she is robbing Matusak of the Ukrainian language—a language she wishes she could speak, too. What is her choice, however, is her own use of English. Janice ponders on what her mother tongue is, English or Ukrainian: "The Ukrainian of my infancy, of lullabies and nonsense rhymes, was my first experience of speech, but the language I used when I was old enough to speak for myself was English" (Keefer, *Honey* 258). She regrets that she "can't shake off [her] shame at not being able to speak proper Ukrainian. And shame is a greater silence" (Keefer, *Honey* 258). The automatic

question that rises is, if this really bothers her, why does she not learn the language? If this inability to communicate in Ukrainian causes her more embarrassment than only knowing basic phrases in the language, would it not be logical to learn to speak Ukrainian fluently than to wallow in this inability? I would argue that this also plays into the paradoxical relationship Janice has with her Canadian-Ukrainian, ethnically hyphenated, identity; and her indecision with ascribing to one, the other, or both national identities.

There are great differences in what Canada means to Janice and what it means to her parents and, even more, to her grandparents Olena and Tomasz. To her grandparents, Canada meant opportunity, as Janice states: “I was born in Canada, which for my family meant a place as blank, as free, as the future itself. But I was born out of their lives as well, out of all they were and all they came from” (Keefer, *Honey* 14). The difference here is that her grandparents chose to move to Canada; she was born in Canada. Nonetheless she chose to ‘go back’ to Ukraine to search her roots, in contrast to her grandparents and parents who chose to go to and stay in Canada. Janice had only heard the stories and wanted to see the country for herself. The progressive prosperity, or upward mobility, often goes hand in hand with successive immigrant offspring generations. In his article “Transcultural Life-Writing”, Alfred Hornung discusses Canadian authors with Eastern European roots, also mentions Keefer, and suggests that “these life-stories about interactions of the Old World in Eastern Europe with the new country of Canada are written from the perspective of migrants successfully settled in North America” (542). This applies also to Keefer and her family. Despite the rough start her grandparents had in Canada, in the end they settled in and prospered in this ‘new’ country. The first generation immigrants—Janice’s grandparents—worked hard, often in physically straining positions, and earned little. The second generation immigrants Janice and her sister (there is no clear reference to her brother’s education) were able to pursue intellectual and creative careers; Janice became a professor of English and her sister studies art³². It is also noteworthy that already the 1.5 generation immigrants Vira and Natalia were able to gain well-paying professions; Vira became a pediatrician³³ and Natalia a fashion

³² See Keefer, *Honey* 137.

³³ See for example Keefer, *Honey* 148.

designer³⁴. Thus the greatest leap forward in the upward mobility took place already between the first and 1.5 immigrant generations. As mentioned before, the third generation immigrants, Keefer's sons, perceive themselves as Canadian. Thus, the family is 'successfully settled' in Canada, and fits Hornung's description.

After talking about not being able to answer the question 'Where are you from?' as easily as "[her] 'English' friends" (Keefer, *Honey* 327-328) in the epilogue, Janice talks about her childhood dreams:

When I was a child, I invented alternative origins for myself: I was an Italian war orphan, the child of Swedish circus artists or one of a clan of Smiths and Joneses. Later, I wanted to dis-invent myself, pretend I came from nowhere, nothing but clear and empty water. I know now there's no water clear or empty enough. I know that what I really want is only this: to be at home. (Keefer, *Honey* 327-328)

Who has not done this at some point; dreamt of being someone else, someone exciting? Is there not a time in every child's life where they wish for a more exciting life? Would it not be even selfish for Janice to claim that this is something only she has dreamt of because of her Ukrainian heritage? I would argue this to be typical of children, not necessarily limited to immigrants' children. To contrast the controversy Janice feels with her Ukrainian heritage, she herself says that "[a]ll through my adolescence I had talked of "my family in Eastern Europe"—it seemed such a romantic connection to possess" (Keefer, *Honey* 305). Thus, on the one hand, again, she feels this ethnic hybridity disturbing her identity. On the other hand, she finds it exciting to have relatives in a strange country far away. These paradoxical views seem to dominate Janice's view of herself and of her home in *Honey and Ashes*. In Keefer's writing there is a sense of the omnipresence of her immigrant heritage and of her Ukrainian ancestors. Janice says "[e]ven if I burned all the papers, the passports and land deeds that connect me with the Old Place, even if I tried to hide my maiden name, it will always be there, the deep ditch of nightmare. It is part of who I am and where I come from" (Keefer, *Honey* 201). Even if her identity and sense of belonging are complex, this complex construct is part of her.

³⁴ See for example Keefer, *Honey* 138.

Janice's mother gives her a small Ukrainian cupboard—a keepsake from the Old Place—with a tilted mirror, and Janice tries to find a suitable place in the house for parading it (Keefer, *Honey* 327). In the end she starts investigating the cupboard and concentrates on the mirror: "And last of all I tilt the mirror, in its scalloped frame, so that I see my face marked by the flaws in the glass: not the spots of tarnish I'd remembered, but a series of vertical lines. When I step back from the mirror, they seem to divide my reflection, making it shift and blur, as if it were crossing border after border" (Keefer, *Honey* 327). This mirror image is reflecting Janice's ethnic identity; her national identity; and her entire identity. Depending on the distance to the mirror, her image varies. Just as depending on whether she sees herself as Ukrainian, Canadian, or Ukrainian-Canadian; her image of herself varies.

5.2. Journey to One's Roots

Over half of *Honey and Ashes* is a retelling of Ukraine's history in relation to Janice's relatives. Janice's journey to Ukraine takes approximately a third of the book; actually the entire book could be seen as, firstly, a preparation of herself and of the reader for the journey, secondly, as a travelogue. Thus, the journey has an immense impact on *Honey and Ashes* and serves as a central theme. I shall analyze this traveling section as travel writing, as the text depicts a journey to a new place, and the protagonist's discoveries during the journey.

In *Honey and Ashes* the sections of travel writing can function as a symbol for the search of one's ethnic heritage that many immigrant offspring go through. It is as if two genres were merging in the book; travel writing and immigrant writing, because the narrator takes the journey in order to find out about her immigrant heritage. In the article "Travel Writing and Gender", Susan Bassnett suggests that "[t]ravel writers today are producing texts for an age characterised by increasing interest in concepts of hybridity, an age in which theories of race and ethnicity, once used as means of dividing peoples, are starting to crumble under the pressure of the millions in movement around the world" (240). This is a very fitting description for Keefer as a travel writer, as she also takes part in the ethnicity discourse, and could also be seen as an ethnic—although I very much prefer the term second generation immigrant—writer. She

is not simply a travel writer, or even a second generation immigrant travel writer, but also a *female* writer. Bassnett discusses the role of women as travel writers. Bassnett suggests that “[w]omen’s travel writing in the late twentieth century tends to focus more on the relationship between the individual and the societies through which she travels” (Bassnett 237). The relationship of Janice and Ukraine is indeed central in the text; it is the focal point of the journey. Her main goal was to find out about her family’s past, to see with her own eyes the places her mother and grandparents had talked about. She wanted to find out about, or establish her own relationship with this country that had somehow marked her but that was, for her, very distant, abstract and almost unreal.

Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan discuss travel writing in their book *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*, and suggest;

[p]erhaps it is best to see travel writing as *pseudoethnographic*, insofar as it purports to provide a document of, or report on, other peoples and cultures while using them as a backdrop for the author’s personal quest. [...] in travel narratives, as in other forms of autobiographical writing, the self is writ large in its alien surroundings. (Holland and Huggan 12)

Indeed, Ukraine is a “backdrop” for Janice’s quest for her Ukrainian identity and family history. It is not the country of Ukraine at the center but Janice and her experience of this country she visits, with the image she has of this country—and its meaning to her—before even visiting it. Paul Theroux has researched travel writing and claims that “travel writing at its best relates a journey of discovery that is frequently risky and sometimes grim and often pure horror, with a happy ending: to hell and back” (Theroux xix), suggesting that after traveling through hard circumstances, the writer happily returns home. This, again, can apply to *Honey and Ashes* also; Janice experiences the relative poverty of Eastern Europe in the 1990s and indeed returns home, to the prosperous Western country of Canada, after her travels.

Peggy Devaux investigates the act of returning to one’s home land after immigration, portrayed in Canadian immigrant writing. She goes into the etymology of the word ‘travel’ pointing out that the word “is linked to the French word *travail* (work), which introduces the idea of painful effort, labor, even torture” (Theroux 199)—similar to Theroux’s idea above of going to “hell and back” (Theroux xix). Devaux continues by noting that

[m]ost of the [immigrant] writers under study [discussed in the article] express and often underline the pain and misery accompanying their return. Sometimes occurring late in life, with the result that no devoted relative awaits them, the return is closer to travel than to a homecoming, since there is no community to return to. (199)

Although the writers of Devaux's study are first generation immigrants, these findings are also applicable to Janice's case; she 'returns' to her mother's home country where only few distant relatives meet her. The quest for the home she thought she might find is, in fact, a trip to a basically foreign country; the village where her mother was born no longer exists, a community even less so. Devaux claims that "[t]o return then amounts to meeting death, in the sense that the traveler's human landmarks have disappeared" (201). The dead village and memories the few relatives refuse to talk about are for Janice like death; she cannot force her relatives to talk, as much as she can make the village exist again. On a very practical note, the people she wishes to find out about are also already dead, have disappeared or are forgotten. Janice's return has much to do with the nostalgia she feels about the foreign place she refers to as 'home'. On another etymological note, Devaux points out that "[t]he very meaning of return is embedded in the word 'nostalgia,' for it derives from the Greek *nostos* (=return). [...] The nostalgia many immigrants feel revolves around a yearning for the 'lost place,' through memories that transform the reality of the past" (202). Janice does not have any own memories of Ukraine, but she still feels the "yearning for 'the lost place'" (Devaux 202) and wants to fulfill this yearning by traveling to Ukraine.

Nazli Kibria terms these travels "homeland trips"; the "voluntary visits to societies of ancestral origin that are limited and fairly short in duration and generally focus on such goals as tourism, leisure, seeing family and friends, and learning, discovering, or rediscovering the cultural aspects and other elements of the ancestral society" (Kibria 297). This is also partly the character of Janice's journey to Ukraine. She wishes to see distant family, and to learn about her ancestors in Ukraine. Kibria discusses Americans with Chinese or Korean heritage, who went on "homeland trips", and writes that "in a variety of ways, the second generation found that the homeland trips made them more aware of their differences with the Chinese or Korean collectivity than their commonalities. The sense of belonging implied by the ties of blood seemed to be overwhelmed

by differences of culture as well as of nationality” (Kibria 306). Kibria continues that these travelers often felt more American after their travels (306-307). Also Janice does not really find the ‘home’ she is looking for in Ukraine. She returns to Canada even earlier than planned. Furthermore, “[d]epending on the specific context, as Americans they could be seen as wealthy, privileged, spoiled, naïve, and aggressive, and implicated in U.S. imperialist agendas” (Kibria 307). Janice is more privileged than her distant relatives in Ukraine, and her quest for her Ukrainian identity is also somewhat naïve. She has never been to the country but calls it ‘home’, and does not speak the country’s language sufficiently. When she finally reaches Ukraine, she expects this foreign country to welcome and embrace her as a family member. She insists on finding out about her family’s history as she queries her distant relatives about painful things that they prefer not talking about. Moreover, for example to her distant Ukrainian relative Evhen, she is mainly, as Lisa Grekul suggests, “a tourist; she doesn’t belong” (Grekul 147). Grekul suggests that the reasons for this are Janice’s wealth and Evhen’s poverty (147). Janice “envies his first-hand knowledge of family history” (Grekul 147). Nonetheless, after the visit hardly anything has changed in both of their lives. Janice will return to Canada³⁵ and continue her life there, and Evhen will continue his in Ukraine. They are not really able to share each other’s lives or find a common ground.

Moreover, Grekul suggests that “Keefer takes for granted her genealogical ties to her family’s past and to their ethnic homeland. Her writing affirms the assumption that bloodlines define ethnic identity and that they constitute definitive links to Ukraine and Ukrainian history” (154). Thus, it is as if Janice assumed that the distant relatives in Ukraine will be just as excited as she is about her quest for information about her family history. She does not seem to take into consideration that their past is much more painful—for example marred with wars, something she never had to experience—and they might prefer simply not talking about the past. Her journey could be seen as an excursion to find about her family’s past, without acknowledging that the people who were ‘left behind’ have a past of their own that they might prefer to forget. She seems to ignore the fact that the history she is looking for also ties in with the Ukrainian relatives’ histories. It is not simply the history of *her* family but also

³⁵ Referring to Grekul (150 and 151), discussed in more detail on page 65 of this thesis.

theirs. Therefore, I see this silence as a symbol for the relatives claiming ownership over their own histories by keeping these stories to themselves. At times, Janice realizes that her expectations are subjective. Reality hits Janice as she calls Katarzyna, a distant relative: “as I dialed Katarzyna’s number, it occurred to me that despite being family, we had almost nothing in common; we might not even like each other” (Keefer, *Honey* 305). The assumption of mutual interest and affection, and the steadfast search for ‘truth’, is at the fore until this point. But reality slowly creeps in into Janice’s expectations and attitudes, too.

The thirst for knowledge about her ancestors, among other things, drives her to go ‘back’ to “that place where she comes from, where she’s never been” (Keefer, *Honey* 162). A few reasons are mentioned in the book for the journey to Ukraine. For example, Janice states that this connection to Ukraine and her partly Ukrainian identity “is part of who I am and where I come from; one of the landmarks on a journey I can’t help but undertake” (Keefer, *Honey* 201). This search for ethnic or national identity through searching for one’s roots is not a rare phenomenon. Michel Butor has written on travel writing in the context of the United States, and suggests that immigrants often simply cannot go back to their native land, nor the immediate generations after immigration (61). He furthermore proposes that “[o]nly when the family finally feels that it belongs, that it is well adopted by the new country, that it is first and foremost ‘American,’ will the descendants wish to visit their country of origin, to renew those ties so painfully cut. This, then, is travel in the history of one’s family” (Butor 61), which is exactly the kind of journey that Janice takes. Even for Janice’s mother it was practically impossible to travel to Ukraine: “thirty years ago, my mother had wanted to visit the Old Place. She’d been advised against it: the border guards would let her in, but they might never let her out again” (Keefer, *Honey* 225). This reflects the first and second, sometimes even third, generation immigrants who—for practical reasons—cannot return to their home country, as Butor suggests (Butor 61). Only when the immigration lies far enough in the past, the immigrant offspring can journey to the ‘old country’. In Keefer’s case, it was the fall of the Soviet Union that enabled her to travel to Ukraine in the late 1990s (Grekul 119).

Besides searching for information about the lives of her ancestors, another major motivator for Janice’s journey is her search for ‘home’. I already

discussed the problematic role of home in the previous chapter; now I would like to consider Janice's search of home in relation to—and during—her journey to Ukraine. Grekul argues that

Kulyk Keefer takes for granted that, however bewildering and fraught she may discover her family's past to be, it will have no material bearing on her in the present. Her literal and figurative journeys "back" to Ukraine may be disorienting and painful, but she knows, long before she departs, that she will return, and that her life in Canada will continue, unchanged. (Grekul 150)

She continues by suggesting that the book creates a circle as it ends where it started; in "her comfortable, middle-class home in Canada" (Grekul 151), and thus weakens the effect of Janice's supposed hesitation concerning 'home' (Grekul 150-151). Janice often returns to pondering on where and what 'home' is: "To know where you belong, what claims not just affection but allegiance make: I envy [Sofia] this. To know, infallibly, where home is, to feel instinctively at home" (Keefer, *Honey* 327). Janice is referring to the following discussion: "Michael asks Sofia whether she would leave L'viv if she had the chance to live somewhere else: Berlin, London, Toronto. 'Never,' she replies. 'Unless I fell in love with a foreigner, but even then—how could I leave my family, how could I abandon my friends?'" (Keefer, *Honey* 260) It is worth mentioning that the reasons for staying that Sofia mentions are people, not the place. One could even argue that the country of Ukraine, or the city of L'viv, have nothing to do with Sofia's answer. This answer implies that the security created by one's loved ones would be the main ingredient of constructing 'home', not what country or city one inhabits. This idea contrasts with Janice's ideas of home that usually are related to geographically defined places, such as Canada or Ukraine.

Janice's sons have a silent role in the book; Janice does not refer to them often. Nonetheless, she wonders how her Canadian sons would have reacted to Ukraine:

What would have happened if our sons had come with us; our sons who don't feel split or doubled but just Canadian, and who carry different burdens than my own? I want them to know the Old Place, so they'll have a fuller sense of who they are. But so much of what they'd find here would be opaque, uncontainable; they'd need constant translations, and I can barely speak the language. (Keefer, *Honey* 237)

This need for giving the sons "a fuller sense of who they are" (Keefer, *Honey* 237) sounds almost like in Wah's case the Canadian society telling him that he

is Chinese, or the Chinese excluding him because he was too white; someone other than oneself trying to define one's identity. Therefore this is a surprising statement from Janice, considering that the sons should be allowed and able to construct their own identity and choose to know or not to know the Old Place. Moreover, "[the sons would] need constant translations" (Keefer, *Honey* 237) also symbolically. For them, this 'old place' is perhaps even more unreal and emotionally further away, than for Janice, as she has stated that the sons see themselves simply as Canadian. These issues do not bother them as they bother Janice; they have no need for searching their ethnic or national identities because their identity is Canadian. It is Janice's need to find out about and just simply to find this old place that marks parts of her identity.

After, and already during Janice's journey, disappointment frames her findings. Grekul suggests that Keefer romanticizes "her family's history [...] because her experiences in Ukraine are marked by disappointment" (145). Janice would like to get closer to her grandparents through the journey: "I want to find whatever traces I can of that life [the life of her grandparents and mother in Ukraine]: leftovers, artifacts that were once as everyday as the mug I use to drink my tea, the brush I pull through my hair. [...] I want to find my grandparents; I want to meet them on their own home ground" (Keefer, *Honey* 253). But Janice's grandparents are there just as little as the things she had heard about. Her grandparents are dead and their old house no longer stands; Janice says that "[t]he house where my mother was born was pulled down after the war—nothing remains of its furnishings, or of the life that went on inside its walls" (Keefer, *Honey* 253). Nonetheless, only a few pages later Janice supposedly finds this house that no longer exists:

I step inside, and then I can't move; it's as though the air I'm breathing is the solid glass of paperweights. Out of time, out of place, I've found my grandmother's house, the very room where my mother was born. What I've always longed for, a desire like the small stones we pick up on a beach and carry in our pockets till their weight comes to feel part of our bones. (Keefer, *Honey* 255).

What she has found in reality is not *the* house but a museum; an idyllic sample of an, apparently generic, old Ukrainian house. She 'finds' the home of her grandmother because the museum/house is as unreal(istic) as the imaginary place she is looking for. Janice puts her disappointment into words: "I did so

little of what I thought I would—I never found my grandparents’ fields, the graves of my infant uncle and aunt, or of Olena’s nameless sister. I bring back no handful of originary soil, only a few dozen photographs, making copies of them for my mother, who recognizes almost nothing that they show” (Keefer, *Honey* 326). The stories she has heard of the orchards and other places are not confirmed through her visit. The place she wanted to visit was not the country of Ukraine; it was the imaginary place of her grandparents’, mother’s and aunt’s stories that she dreamt of. Janice does wonder “[h]ow far back can I *imagine* the people I come from?” (my emphasis in italics, Keefer, *Honey* 169), and admits that, during the journey, she will be “looking for something that doesn’t exist anymore” (Keefer, *Honey* 244). She does not fully believe in these imaginary people and places herself but tries to hold on to them as long as possible. These naïve images are shattered, and Janice’s disappointment is inevitable because this image she had of the old place was no longer—if it indeed ever was—true.

6. Racism

In this chapter I will discuss how racism is portrayed in the books; how the narrators and other characters experience racism as victims, and what kind of racist attitudes do the characters themselves have. I chose to dedicate a separate chapter of its own to this topic because racism appears in all three books, and it is a topic that to a greater or lesser degree touches all of the characters. I shall first look at some scholarly discussions on racism, and thereafter discuss each book in the same order as earlier.

In the theory section of this thesis³⁶ I already shortly introduced a definition of racism. In addition, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin suggest that “‘racism’ is not so much a product of the concept of race as the very reason for its existence. Without the underlying desire for hierarchical categorization implicit in racism, ‘race’ would not exist” (199). Thus, if people did not feel the need to categorize one another in more privileged and less privileged groups—and doing this mainly based on physical traits—such a term as ‘race’ would be redundant. Oftentimes, these categorizations are done by people who hold power of some sort. John W. Berry and Rudolf Kalin mention the role of power in racism. They suggest that “for some researchers, racism is a combination of prejudice plus the power to act on that prejudice; that is to say, prejudice held by a non-dominant group toward the dominant group would not qualify as racism” (172). One could also call this ‘prejudice’ a racist attitude, and the action, then, ‘racism’. Racist attitudes and racism can stem from painful experiences or ignorance but, I would argue, even the reasons being understandable, these attitudes and actions are never acceptable. I would even go so far as to argue that racism, or feeding racist attitudes, is always the result a choice and a very disagreeable one.

In Salverson’s *The Viking Heart*, racism has various forms and is directed at various characters and groups of people; it is both directed towards and experienced by the immigrants. Nonetheless, also the immigrants have racist attitudes towards other peoples and nationalities. In the beginning of the novel, as the immigrants are located in Gimli, a smallpox epidemic spreads. The

³⁶ See pages 20-22 of this thesis: chapter “2.3.1. Racism”.

government representative Mr. Thom claimed that this was simply due to the dirtiness of the immigrants (Salverson 43), implying that these foreign people were filthy and unsophisticated and therefore attracted illnesses, unlike the 'clean' and sophisticated Canadians. This notion of the foreign being filthy or unclean is not a rare phenomenon.³⁷ It also has to do with the idea of the foreign not being as sophisticated as one's own people. This attitude most likely has its roots in the fear of the foreign; of experiencing the unknown as something threatening and then turning this fear into a feeling of superiority and even active dominance over the 'foreign'.

The negative attitudes towards and prejudices against the Icelanders seem to trouble the characters. Bjorn puts it in words; "You know the attitude that the people had towards us. Suspicion, distrust and contempt" (Salverson 108). A few pages later, Bjorn ponders more on the subject: "Sjera Bjarni, I wonder if you know how hard it is to make the average Canadian believe that we are not some wild northern savages? One reason I went farming was the insufferable attitude of some of the men I worked with" (Salverson 112). Indeed, Bjorn's family then ends up living in an area with Icelandic neighbors, communicating mainly with other Icelanders.

However, the Icelanders in the novel are not only victims of racism. They also have racist attitudes and prejudices towards peoples they are not accustomed with. First of all, as the settlers travel by boats, they "[see] their first red man" (Salverson 26). This Native American is highly exoticized, and almost serves as an attraction for the new settlers as it is mentioned that "[t]he immigrants were impressed and amazed" (Salverson 26) of this foreigner. At the same time, some of them are afraid "of hiding countless hordes that any moment might rush down upon them" (Salverson 26). They are simultaneously attracted by and afraid of this stranger. The Icelandic characters in *The Viking Heart* also have racist attitudes towards specific groups of people. When Balder talks about Elizabeth with Finna, and Finna tells him about Elizabeth's possible romance with Mr. Krantz, Balder is not pleased with this idea and unveils an anti-Semitic attitude: "'Why, Krantz is a Jew!' There was surprise and resentment in his voice" (Salverson 287). Balder sees Mr. Krantz as a

³⁷ See for example Colloredo-Mansfield, Rudi. "'Dirty Indians', Radical Indígenas, and the Political Economy of Social Differences in Modern Ecuador." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (May, 1998), pp.185-205.

competitor and thus insults Krantz and tries to find negative attributes about him. Balder's racist attitudes come to the fore through his jealousy concerning Elizabeth. Finna herself gets caught having racist attitudes towards the French as she finds out that her son has married a French girl: "Picture it, Margaret, me with a foreign woman and an idol worshipper, maybe, messing around in my nice kitchen. It's not a meal for a Christian I'll be thinking she can cook" (Salverson 311). Here, again, the assumed unsophisticated nature and pagan religion of the foreigner is emphasized, and this prejudice is based on ignorance, as France is, indeed, a highly civilized country, and is traditionally Catholic. Possibly not knowing this, Finna assumes that this foreign woman must practice some pagan religion, and judges the foreigner based on this prejudice.

In the case of *Diamond Grill* there are mainly two types of racism; within the extended family, and from the outside community towards the Wah family. As previously mentioned, Fred Wah senior was half Chinese, half Irish-Scots, born a Canadian but largely brought up in China. He married a Swedish girl, Coreen, who had immigrated to Canada with her parents when she was younger. Fred senior and Coreen experience racism from the Swedish side of the family. Coreen's decision to marry Fred did not please her parents:

Dirty heathens, Granny Erickson thinks of the Chinese, the whole bunch of them, in their filthy cafes downtown. Just because that boy dresses up and has a little money, she throws herself at him. She and those other girls, [...] that Coreen, she'll ruin herself, you wait and see, she'll be back here for help soon enough. Well she can look out for herself, she's not going to get any more of my money, she can just take her medicine, now that she's living with that Chinaman, nobody'll speak to her, the little hussy. (Wah, *Diamond* 8)

The racial prejudice of Granny Erickson is so strong that it makes her turn her back on her own daughter. This racism is most likely also mixed with pride and fear of judgment from the society. Furthermore, this perception of the foreigner being something dirty or filthy is evident in this excerpt, too. The narrator later explains how his mother's parents finally learned to accept the situation, or at least to endure it; "She [Fred's mother] married my dad a year after [they met] and was shunned by her family for marrying a Chinaman. At least until I was born; my blond hair and blue eyes enough to ease her parents' anxiety about the colour of their grandson's skin" (Wah, *Diamond* 42-43). Based on this, the

young Wah family was first rejected by the Swedish side because of racism—because of Fred senior’s half-Chineseness—and later welcomed again on the basis of Fred junior’s physical appearance: he was white enough. As the offspring was ‘whiter’ than the father, it was accepted by the Ericksons.

The Wah family also experiences racism from the surrounding community and society at large. This kind of societal racism was also the reason behind many laws and regulations against the Chinese in Canada in the first half of the 20th Century, as previously discussed. Wah also writes on this topic in relation to Diamond Grill, the restaurant: “[s]ome people in town said she [Florence, Fred senior’s mother] shouldn’t work there [at the Regal]. They didn’t like white girls working in restaurants. This was just before Saskatchewan made a law against hiring white women to work in Chinese places” (Wah, *Diamond* 57). Thus, just as in the case of the government regulations on the immigration of the Chinese, the Chinese were mistreated by the government, with laws based on ethnic discrimination, simply because of their nationality.

The narrator is a victim of racism already in school. This ‘inherited’ racism that children express is one of the saddest kind, as it in most cases is simply passed on from parents to children, attitudes and ideas that are left unquestioned and unfiltered but kept alive. Both cases that the narrator describes take place in school: “I’m fairly blond in grade four and still she calls me a Chink. Out loud in the schoolyard at Central School, and with her eyes too, real daggers, a painful spike” (Wah, *Diamond* 39). It is unclear if this first incident is, actually, the same as the following: “Until Mary McNutter calls me a Chink, I’m not one. That’s in elementary school. Later, I don’t have to be because I don’t look like one. But just then, I’m stunned. I’ve never thought about it. After that I start to listen, and watch. Some people are different. You can see it. Or hear it.” (Wah, *Diamond* 98). This incident makes him aware of the racism that surrounds him. The narrator notes that he is not a ‘Chink’ before he is called by the name, before he is expressed to be one. This is the phenomenon of society trying to form one’s identity. The narrator rejects it, as he explains that his white looks allow him to ‘be white’. He escapes the categorization because of his physical appearance that allows him to be what he wants and what he chooses to be: “I become as white as I can, which, considering I’m mostly Scandinavian, is pretty easy for me” (Wah, *Diamond* 98).

This could also be categorized as mimicry as the narrator ‘acts’ white or Chinese when he sees fit, usually to his own benefit. Racism of the society determines some of the narrator’s choices, too. Peer pressure drives Fred to a racist direction also:

The old Chinamen have always been friends of my dad’s. They give us kids candy. I go fishing down by the boat-houses with one of them. He’s a nice man, shiny brown knuckles, baits my hook, shows me how to catch mudsuckers, shows me how to row a boat. We’re walking back up the hill with our catch of suckers and some kids start chinky, chinky Chinaman and I figure I’d better not be caught with him anymore. (Wah, *Diamond* 98)

When the narrator realizes that he might also be mocked or seen as a ‘Chinaman’ if he spends time with the old Chinese man. Fred chooses not to spend time with him in order to fit better in the ‘white’ crowd, and starts himself to avoid the Chinese old man so that he would not also be labeled as a ‘Chink’. The narrator changes his behavior—and the people he spends time with—based on the acceptance that other children do or do not grant some representatives of certain minority groups. He does not want to ‘mar’ his white image by spending too much time in public with the old Chinese man. The motif of name-calling recurs a few times in the book; “After school, Chink, Limy, Kraut, Wop, Spik. The whole town” (Wah, *Diamond* 36).³⁸ This indicates that it is not only the Chinese that are called names. Granted, the way they were treated in Canada is a particularly brutal one. However, the narrator seems to be putting all the immigrants, or rather immigrant offspring, in one group. They are all called names, therefore, in the end it is irrelevant who represents which immigrant group and who is being called names; they are all in it together. Another interpretation for this excerpt would be that these names were used by ‘the whole town’ to label the immigrants and their children, since all these words are derogatory; for example ‘Chink’ instead of Chinese, ‘Kraut’ instead of German. Behind the name-calling lies perhaps the racism of the town: the whole town saw the immigrant groups as something less worthy, that they were all just representatives of their ‘old’ countries and not proper Canadians.

³⁸ Name-calling appears also on pages 59 and 98 in *Diamond Grill*.

In Keefer's *Honey and Ashes* it is not really the narrator Janice who experiences racism, but the characters Natalia, Vira, Tomasz and Olena: the first and 1.5 generation Ukrainian immigrants in Canada. The narrator says that

[t]o those who own this place they are incurably foreign; if they're overheard speaking to someone in their own language, slurs like *bohunk* will be tossed their way. Not the colour of their skin, but the width and slant of their cheekbones, the very shape of their tongues mark them out as different, dangerous—why else would English people—the *Angliks*—go to such lengths to keep clear of them as they walk down the street? “It will pass,” Olena's neighbours tell her. Or else, “You'll get used to it.” (Keefer, *Honey* 122)

Their language and the shape of their faces marked these people as Ukrainians. It was as if the Ukrainians did not have the right to speak their own language or even live in Canada, a problem of many minority groups. The Ukrainians were—and still are—a large minority in Canada, and they had to come to terms with the racism of the Anglo-Canadians, just as the Chinese and the Icelanders did. Notably, as in *Diamond Grill*, the immigrant (offspring) is also called by the derogatory name ‘bohunk’. Nonetheless, the Ukrainians also call English speakers ‘Angliks’ as I will point out in a few paragraphs. In the case of *Honey and Ashes*, the racism becomes less relevant with each generation; with each generation their Ukrainianness vanishes more and more and the people in question become more and more anglicized.

The immigrants experience racism from the beginning of their stay in Canada. The narrator recounts a story of Natalia going to school at the age of fourteen and having to attend a kindergarten class, probably because of her lacking English skills. The narrator calls the following a “cruel, arrogant behaviour on the school's part” (Keefer, *Honey* 133), and I suggest it to be a racist activity, as the teacher makes the foreign girl a laughing stock instead of teaching her:

In the classroom the teacher draws a picture of a rooster on the blackboard. Rapping it with his pointer, he demands that the big, shy, foreign girl tell him what the creature's called—something anyone out of diapers must surely know. And Natalia, who could have answered him in Ukrainian, Polish or even Russian, is laughed down when she comes up with the only answer she can manage: “Chicken's father.” (Keefer, *Honey* 133)

What is striking in this incident is the teacher's total ignorance of Natalia's ability to speak three languages, as her inability to name the rooster in English is

emphasized. The teacher stands higher in the hierarchy of the school than the pupil, and is practices his power over the girl. Thus he acts out his power through racism, which fits perfectly with Berry's and Kalin's suggestion on the relation between power and racism; racism usually is an act directed toward the weaker part. Had Natalia told the teacher that she is better than him and the whole class because she can name the rooster in three languages instead of just one language, according to Berry and Kalin that would not have been racism since Natalia was in an underdog position, she had no power over the teacher. However, the teacher used—or rather abused—his position of power over Natalia and made known to her and the entire class Natalia's incompetence in English, thus, emphasizing even more his authoritarian position over her.

Even later, when Janice's sister is in school, the ones in power use that power to dominate the weak:

my sister, who has always spoken Ukrainian with her family, will be sent home from kindergarten with a warning note: if she keeps speaking "Russian" in the schoolyard, the authorities will have to be alerted. My parents stop speaking Ukrainian with both their daughters, and by the time it's politically safe for us to be sent to Ukrainian school—the one run by the cathedral on Bathurst Street—we have become strangers to the language, and will never find a way to make it home. (Keefer, *Honey* 149)

Again, the more authoritarian group uses language as a weapon to restrict or rule over the minority. Denying the right to use one's mother tongue is a brutal way to dominate the way one is able to express or experience one's ethnicity. The teachers are not even bothered to find out what language the sister really speaks but categorize it as "Russian". To an untrained ear Ukrainian and Russian might sound identical but it is, again, a sign of ignorance on the kindergarten's part to not even know what the child's mother tongue is. This ignorance, then, is acted out in authority.

Nonetheless, also the Ukrainian characters have racist prejudices against other people groups, for example the 'Angliks'. When Natalia starts dating, these prejudices come to the forefront: "It was unthinkable, in the way television or space travel must have been unthinkable, that Natalia or Vira would go out with, let alone marry, someone who wasn't *nashi* or "our own". How could you know anything about the people of a Macedonian or a Scotsman?" (Keefer, *Honey* 41) The fear of the foreign was a controlling

motivator for Tomasz and Olena for wishing that their daughters would marry inside the Ukrainian-Canadian community. Perhaps the hope of keeping Ukrainian traditions and the language alive played a part in this, just as the hope for familiarity—one often prefers what one is accustomed to. In addition, mixed with this attitude, there surely is a hint of the idea that one's own nationality, ethnic group, or other affiliation, would be superior to others. The drama reaches its height when Vira dates an Irishman:

Vira's suitor, on the other hand, was straight from County Galway. Those who had telephones called, those who didn't came to the house to express their astonishment that the Solowskis could give their daughter away to an *Anglik*—no one made distinctions then between different kind of native English speakers. [...] Who was this "Gus"—what kind of a name was that? What were Tomasz and Olena thinking—had they no shame? (Keefer, *Honey* 42)

Thus, within the Ukrainian community, it is apparently seen as a great shame to give a daughter away to a non-Ukrainian, as if one were committing treason. What is important in this excerpt is the comment that for these Ukrainian-Canadians it did not matter where an English native speaker really came from; they were all 'Angliks'. Just as the language Janice's sister had been speaking in the schoolyard was Russian for the kindergarten personnel, so for the Ukrainians all English speakers constituted a vague group, the 'Angliks', even if they were representatives of several nationalities.

Janice refers to the hostile relationship between Ukrainians and Jews, and how this constellation bothers her. She retells a story from her youth and talks about 'inherited' racism³⁹. Janice waits for a bus with a Ukrainian-Canadian friend who calls a Jewish boy, standing on the opposite side of the street, by an insulting Ukrainian name (Keefer, *Honey* 195). Janice talks about her shock: "It's not just the ugly tone of her voice but her use of the Ukrainian word that shakes me; suddenly it's as if we're standing not on a Toronto street, but in the mud of some forlorn provincial town in Eastern Europe. [...] But I've never forgotten that spontaneous expression of learned contempt" (Keefer, *Honey* 195-196). Her expression 'learned contempt' could easily be used as a synonym for 'inherited' racism; it is without thought or judgment of one's own, it

³⁹ The same kind as referred to on page 71 of this thesis, in relation to Wah's *Diamond Grill*.

is a simple taking over of someone else's opinions about a matter without challenging them at all.

The foreign names of the characters are also often met with racist attitudes. Vira studies to become a doctor and is asked to "change her name from Solowska to Smith so that her patients' parents won't have to know their children are being handled by someone from *that* part of the world" (Keefer, *Honey* 148). This implies that people—i.e. Canadians—would think that their children would not be treated properly if a person with an Eastern European name was attending them, indicating that Eastern Europeans cannot be good doctors; all this despite the fact that she received her education in Canada. At one point Natalia seems to be giving in to the pressure of changing one's name: "Natalia's so tired of spelling out S-O-L-O-W-S-K-A; of hearing, "What kind of a name is *that*?" So she tells the shopgirl, "Sloane"" (Keefer, *Honey* 139) while asking for the clothes she bought to be delivered to her home. This is not a permanent name change but it portrays the lessening importance of the Ukrainian name, at least for Natalia. It is as if she were implying that she no longer lives in Ukraine, why should she not have an English name. This tiredness of having to explain one's heritage—or at least the name—is understandable. Also in *Diamond Grill* the narrator expresses the wish to "be left alone" (Wah, *Diamond* 54) with which Natalia seems to concur. They do not wish for people to ask multiple questions of one's assumed origin. These hopes are similar also to Bjorn's reason for farming in *The Viking Heart*, as he chooses this occupation in order to escape the strange attitudes of the Canadians (Salverson 112). All three of them seem to agree with Fred's wish to "be left alone" (Wah, *Diamond* 54).

7. Conclusion

The second generation immigrant authors discussed in this thesis presented issues concerning not only second generation immigrants, but also their predecessors. The first and 1.5 generation immigrants, so to say, paved the way in the new country that for the second generation was in no way new anymore. Through the analysis it became evident that the books *The Viking Heart*, *Diamond Grill* and *Honey and Ashes* portray similar features of the immigrant experience in Canada. Questions concerning where one belongs, where one comes from, and where one's home really is are often pondered in the books. Also for the second generation immigrant characters, the question of one's ethnic or national identity and the problems in constructing this identity remain major issues.

The problems these first, 1.5, and second generation immigrant characters face seem to be of two types; related to the physical and practical, or more related to the psychological and emotional aspects. *The Viking Heart* portrays the immigrant experience of farming Icelanders whose difficulties are largely practical: death, illness, troubles with their low income, and natural disasters. Contrastingly, in *Honey and Ashes*, the problems are not singularly physical or practical; the second generation immigrants are faced with emotional and almost philosophical problems concerning feelings of belonging and identification with nationalities or cultures. Lastly, these abstract questions and problems concerning one's identity and ethnicity are also prominent in *Diamond Grill*. Nonetheless, all immigrant families discussed are able to secure upward mobility with the successive generations. The reasons and goals these immigrants had for immigration—economic stability and a better future for their children—were all met. This upward mobility is evident with the well-earning second generation; this can be seen both with the characters and the authors. Salverson became a published author, her second generation characters were, for example, a doctor and a fashion designer. Wah is a professor of English, as is Keefer; already Keefer's 1.5 generation immigrant aunt became a doctor and Keefer's mother a fashion designer—interestingly enough, Salverson's fictional second generation characters Thor and Elizabeth practiced more or less the

same professions as Keefer's 'real life' aunt and mother; Thor and Vira became doctors, Elizabeth and Natalia fashion designers.

To take a few concluding examples of the immigrant experience I would briefly like to return to the role of one's name as a determiner of 'foreignness', and the concept of the hyphen marking people—especially second generation immigrants—living between countries, nationalities, languages, and cultures. Firstly, name seems to be an influential feature in the construction of an (immigrant) identity, especially in *Diamond Grill* and in *Honey and Ashes*. In *The Viking Heart* the characters have Icelandic names written with the Latin alphabet without the special Icelandic characters, and are, thus, for the Canadian public, easier to read, pronounce, and to relate to. In *Honey and Ashes*, Natalia is tired of having the 'foreign' name Solowska; Fred's family name Wah in *Diamond Grill* lets WASP Canadians assume that he is Chinese, and contrastingly the name causes amusement among the Chinese because of Fred's obvious non-Chineseness. Name seems to be an important marker for all three writers. The female authors Keefer and Salverson retained their 'foreign' maiden names Kulyk and Goodman⁴⁰, to use them with their husbands' family names. For Wah, the name is a major marker of his Chinese heritage; practically the only visible sign of his partial Chineseness. Thus, names become *the* signifier of one's 'foreignness' or immigrant roots; name is one of the first things one gets to know of a person, and we always carry our names with us.

To turn to the second final example of a marker of 'foreignness', the hyphen marks most of the second generation immigrant characters, especially in *Diamond Grill* and in *Honey and Ashes*. Janice and Fred are hyphenated, Chinese- or Ukrainian-Canadian, and represent neither only their families' country of origin, nor simply Canada, because of this hyphenated status. Wah writes about the hyphen very explicitly. He seems not to have a problem with his multiethnicity but wishes that he would be left alone and not bothered with questions of Chineseness, Canadianness, or if he has the 'right' to one or the other. I referred to Berry's and Sabatier's study on second generation

⁴⁰ Salverson's parents were Lárus Guðmundsson and Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir (source: Hreinsson *Personalities from the history of Western Icelanders* online); thus her Icelandic name would have been Guðmundsdóttir after the naming tradition; 'dóttir' meaning 'daughter'. Phonetically, 'Goodman' is similar to 'Guðmund'—the Icelandic family name without 'daughter'—and thus an easy Anglicization of the name.

immigrants. The result of the study was, perhaps surprisingly, the positive effect on the second generation immigrants' lives when they embraced both their heritage culture and the surrounding culture. In *The Viking Heart*, it became clear that Thor embraced and respected his Icelandic roots, but took part in the surrounding culture, did not exclude or isolate himself from it, and, indeed, saw himself as a Canadian. In relation to Fred in *Diamond Grill*, his multiethnic heritage seemed not to cause problems for Fred, but to people around him, as they had difficulties relating to his ethnically rich and varied roots. In the case of Janice in *Honey and Ashes*, this was more problematic, as she seemed not to be able to find a balance between her Ukrainianness and Canadianness—a balance that could perhaps have been reached by embracing both ethnicities and nationalities, based on the findings of Berry and Sabatier.

The three types of literature represented in the books—partially or throughout the books—were prairie writing, gastronomic literature, and travel writing. Moreover, these literary genres can also be seen as features of the immigrant experience. Prairie writing serves as a venue for newcomers in the prairies to express themselves through literature. In *The Viking Heart*, the immigrants started a new life on the prairies, surrounded by vast natural landscapes and mainly other Icelanders. Their 'new start' was very practical as they had to start cultivating land on the thinly populated prairies—a common destination for immigrants (McCracken online). The sections of gastronomic literature in *Diamond Grill* present a way for the second generation immigrant, Fred, to express his complex ethnicity and multiethnic heritage through the mundane but necessary act of cooking. Just as everyone has roots—multiethnic or not—eating and cooking concern all people, immigrants, non-immigrants, minority groups, and majorities alike. Through his cooking, Fred is able and allowed to express which ever nationality or ethnicity—or neither—he wishes, in the confines of his own kitchen. Lastly, chapters of travel writing in *Honey and Ashes* represent the act of going back to the 'old place' where one possibly has never been but that one carries in one's family's history. Janice travels to the 'foreign' country where her mother was born. This foreign country has, slightly paradoxically, marked her ever since her childhood, even though she had never been there, nor was she able to fluently speak the country's language. By traveling to this country of 'origin', Janice is in a practical way able to search for

her ethnic origins, and to see this unfamiliar country that has been part of her for her whole life.

Has the Canadian multiculturalism—both the governmental programs and the general construct and attitude of Canadian society at large—succeeded, based on the three books? When it comes to being able and even expected to hold on to one's 'original' or heritage culture, the Icelandic immigrants kept mainly to themselves in *The Viking Heart* and were able to practice their Icelandic culture. The drawback of this is isolation; they mainly stayed in their Icelandic community with their Icelandic neighbors. One of the features of multiculturalism is that immigrant and minority groups are allowed—if not even supposed and expected—to retain the heritage culture alive and often remain in their own communities. Nonetheless, the children of the Icelanders saw themselves as Canadians, and the heritage culture started to lose its grip as the second generation children were already largely integrated and assimilated.

The mixed Chinese-Swedish-Canadian family of Fred Wah in *Diamond Grill* is, in its multiethnicity, very Canadian. Unfortunately, however, Chineseness was forced upon Fred, as he was often labeled Chinese by society and by other people. Another potential negative consequence of multiculturalism is, then, having a certain ethnicity forced upon a person or being forced to represent an ethnicity because of immigrant heritage, without being able to decide on the matter oneself. A person can easily be seen as a representative of a minority group, and is easily denied access to the larger 'Canadian' society because of the minority background, even if the particular person would prefer to integrate into the majority. This 'support' of the heritage cultures becomes a hindrance when it is assumed that all immigrants and minority groups prefer to stay in their groupings, without keeping a relevant discussion in progress in order to see if this really is the need of these particular groups and society. The Ukrainian-Canadians of the 1.5 immigrant generation in *Honey and Ashes* did, for example, put their second generation children in a Ukrainian Saturday school in order to keep the heritage language alive—for Janice's part largely without success. This kind of educational support of the minority groups was possible mainly thanks to the multiculturalism programs. Nonetheless, it should not be forced upon anyone and, as seen in all three

books, usually only serves the first few generations of immigrants, after which integration and assimilation usually takes place; the immigrants' offspring, like Keefer's sons, see themselves as Canadians and are no longer able to speak the heritage language. This 'third' immigrant generation often no longer identifies with the heritage country or its culture because it lies so far back in the family's history, and is perhaps no longer relevant for these distant generations who see themselves as Canadians.

There seems to be a troubling binary pattern within the attitudes of many immigrants. On the one hand they want to leave the 'old country' in order to give their children a better future and more possibilities. On the other hand, they often try to hold on to the 'old country' traditions, trying to keep them alive by force, not realizing that these traditions have already been changed; the setting or the culture are no longer the same, usually neither is the language or the surrounding culture. A simplistic question would be to ask 'Why immigrate in the first place if one wants to live the way one did in the home country?' Often the emotional connection to the home country is strong when the reason for immigration is a practical one, and when family or relatives stay behind. It would be important to understand that one cannot, by force, keep a culture alive. Moreover, some adjustments and even sacrifices must be made if one decides to become a resident or a citizen of a country other than one's country of origin.

All in all, for the later generations, the immigrant experience lies in the past, and often it has no effect on them any more. Derrick Thomas writes that people of various origins see themselves as Canadians in rising numbers:

The proportion of the population claiming some element of Canadian ethno-cultural ancestry climbed from fewer than 1% in 1986 to nearly 40% in 2001, making it by far the most common ethno-cultural ancestry reported in the census. Moreover, more than half of the 11.7 million persons who reported 'Canadian' described their ancestry as *exclusively* Canadian without mentioning any other ethnic connection. (Thomas 2 online)

The second generation immigrant protagonists of the books analyzed also saw themselves as Canadians. In *The Viking Heart*, Thor explicitly states that Canada is his country (Salverson 294); in *Diamond Grill*, the young Fred would like to write "Canadian" as his "racial origin" but is not allowed to (Wah, *Diamond* 53); in *Honey and Ashes*, Janice says she knows that she is Canadian (Keefer, *Honey* 217). In contrast, for their parents (1.5 generation immigrants),

and even more so for the grandparents (1st generation immigrants), the heritage culture and national identity were more important: Borga has difficulties letting go of Iceland (Salverson 294); Fred senior's English is not perfect and he speaks Chinese (Wah, *Diamond* 61); Olena kept her hopes alive of perhaps one day returning to Ukraine (Keefer, *Honey* 113). Thus, most of the characters struggle with their immigrant identities, and with feelings of belonging or not belonging to Canada.

A general pattern is that the 'old country' ways usually gradually lessen by every generation after immigration. The further in the history the immigration lies, the more assimilated the offspring usually is. This can be seen in the books analyzed in this thesis, as with each generation the heritage culture, language and even looks become more and more transparent and Canadianized. This can be seen as successful integration, and even as assimilation, if the markers that earlier separated the immigrants from the greater, WASP, public have diminished, disappeared, or simply become irrelevant. With each generation, the characters become more Canadian; the language of origin is no longer in use; they might even look more Caucasian; they do not identify with the country of origin or the national/ethnic identity of the immigrant generation. From a different perspective, the reason this immigrant offspring is no longer 'special' or 'foreign' might also be a result of the large numbers of immigrants that from all over the globe to Canada. Canada is no longer a 'white' country, but a country of many colors, ethnicities, languages—of people who see themselves as, and indeed are, Canadians.

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Abstract

Canada is known for its multiculturalism, for the mosaic construct of its society, and for the vast amounts of immigrants entering the country each year. These themes are, however, often only presented in a theoretical light. What is life *really* like for immigrants in Canada? In my Master's thesis I investigate how immigration and immigrant life are portrayed in three books by Canadian second generation immigrant authors: *The Viking Heart* by Laura Goodman Salverson, *Diamond Grill* by Fred Wah, and *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* by Janice Kulyk Keefer. On the forefront of my discussion are questions such as: How did the first, 1.5, and second generation immigrant characters experience immigration and living in a 'foreign' country? How did they experience having parents or other family members from another country and another culture? What kind of a role did immigrant heritage and language issues play?

In the theory section, I give an overview of the history of immigrants in Canada, concentrating on Icelandic-, Chinese-, and Ukrainian-Canadians, as these groups are featured in the three books. I also discuss the concept of multiculturalism in Canada, how it has been acted out as a government policy, and how it has been perceived—both positively and negatively. Moreover, a short consideration is given to the question whether or not Canada should be included in the postcolonial discussion. Lastly, the concept of racism is introduced.

The second part of the thesis consists of an analysis of the books, one by one. In the analysis of Salverson's *The Viking Heart*, I firstly concentrate on how the characters in the novel construct their immigrant identities. Secondly, I investigate features of prairie writing that are very prominent in the novel. The second book discussed is Wah's 'biotext' *Diamond Grill*. Here the construction of a 'hyphenated' identity is analyzed. Moreover, the protagonist's self-perception is influenced by his relationship to Chinese food and to his father's restaurant. Therefore, these issues are also taken into consideration. In the analysis of Keefer's *Honey and Ashes*, I discuss the protagonist's struggles with her immigrant heritage. The second half of the discussion on *Honey and Ashes*

is devoted to the protagonist's journey to Ukraine, and analyzed as travel writing. Finally, I investigate the phenomenon of racism in all three books.

Zusammenfassung

Kanada ist als multikulturelles Land bekannt, dessen Bevölkerung jährlich durch Immigration wächst. Das Konzept ‚kulturelles Mosaik‘ wird oft in Diskussionen über die kanadische Gesellschaft verwendet. Diese Themen werden jedoch meist nur in der Theorie behandelt. Wie ist das *wirkliche* Leben der Einwanderer in Kanada? In meiner Masterarbeit analysiere ich die Darstellung von Immigration und dem Leben der Einwanderer in drei Büchern von kanadischen Immigranten zweiter Generation: *The Viking Heart* von Laura Goodman Salverson, *Diamond Grill* von Fred Wah, und *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* von Janice Kulyk Keefer. Im Vordergrund meiner Diskussion stehen unter anderem folgende Fragen: Wie haben eingewanderte Charaktere der ersten, der 1,5. und der zweiten Generation die Immigration erlebt? Wie war das Leben in einem ‚fremden‘ Land für sie? Wie haben sie die Tatsache, dass ihre Eltern oder andere Familienmitglieder aus einem anderen Land und einer anderen Kultur kamen, erlebt? Was für eine Rolle haben das Erbe und die Sprache der Vorfahren gespielt?

Im Theorie-Teil der Arbeit wird ein Überblick über die Geschichte der Immigranten in Kanada gegeben. Der Schwerpunkt wird dabei auf die Kanadier isländischer (‚Icelandic-Canadians‘), chinesischer (‚Chinese-Canadians‘), und ukrainischer (‚Ukrainian-Canadians‘) Abstammung gelegt, da diese Gruppen in den ausgewählten Büchern vorkommen. Auch wird diskutiert, wie das Konzept des Multikulturalismus in Kanada ausgeübt und empfunden worden ist—sowohl im Positiven als auch Negativen. Weiters wird die Frage, ob Kanada zum Postkolonialen Diskurs hinzugefügt werden sollte, kurz debattiert. Schlussendlich wird auch das Konzept ‚Rassismus‘ vorgestellt.

Im zweiten Teil der Arbeit werden die drei ausgewählten Bücher genauer untersucht. Die Analyse von Salverson’s *The Viking Heart* konzentriert sich einerseits darauf, wie die Charaktere ihre Identitäten als Immigranten bilden. Andererseits werden Eigenschaften der Prärie-Literatur (‚Prairie Writing‘), da diese sehr eindeutig in dem Roman zu erkennen sind, besprochen. Das nächste Buch, welches einer Analyse unterzogen wird, ist der ‚Biotext‘ *Diamond Grill* von Fred Wah. Zunächst wird die Konstruktion der ‚hyphenated identity‘ (‚mit Bindestrich geschriebenes“ nationales Selbstverständnis) des

Hauptcharakters analysiert. Weiters wird ein Bezug zwischen dem Selbstbild des Protagonisten und der Rolle des chinesischen Essens und des Restaurants seines Vaters hergestellt. Beim dritten Buch, Keefer's *Honey and Ashes*, werden als erstes die Probleme der Hauptfigur, welche sie mit der Immigrationgeschichte ihrer Familie hat, besprochen. Der zweite Teil der Analyse wird der Reise der Hauptfigur in die Ukraine gewidmet. Diese wird als Reisebeschreibung („Travel Writing“) betrachtet. Zuletzt werden die rassistischen Merkmale der drei Bücher behandelt.

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