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Scottish Perceptions of Canada in the 1950s: The Autobiography of Margaret Gillies Brown

Zusammenfassung

*Die Migrationsbewegungen zwischen Schottland und Kanada in der Zeit nach dem 2. Weltkrieg liefern den historischen Rahmen für Margaret Gillies Browns autobiographischen Text *Far From the Rowan Tree* (1997). Die Autorin verließ im Januar 1959 mit ihrem Mann und drei Kindern Schottland und kehrte 1961 zurück. Aus der Perspektive der Ehefrau und Mutter schildert sie ihr Leben in Kanada und reflektiert über kulturelle Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede sowie Konflikte und Lernprozesse, die sich aus ihrer diasporischen Situation ergeben. Dabei greift sie vielfach auf wohl etablierte Erzählmotive aus der kolonialen Phase Kanadas wie z.B. die Härten des Pionierlebens, das Angewiesensein auf die 'Eingeborenen' und Loyalität zum Mutterland zurück. Mit diesen Erzählstrategien überschreibt sie Erfahrungen der Fremdheit, legitimiert sie ihre eigene Präsenz in Kanada und ihren Anspruch auf Akzeptanz als Anglo-Kanadierin. In dieser Identitätsverhandlung wird erkennbar, wie stark auch nach dem 2. Weltkrieg koloniale Muster die Konstruktion der kanadischen Wirklichkeit durch britische MigrantInnen prägten, denn Gillies Brown reproduziert in modernisierter, aber relativ ungebrochener Form eine (post)koloniale Siedlermentalität.*

Résumé

*Les mouvements migratoires entre l'Écosse et le Canada dans la période suivant la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale livrent le cadre historique au texte autobiographique de Margaret Gillies Brown *Far From the Rowan Tree* (1997). L'auteure quitta l'Écosse en janvier 1959 avec son mari et ses trois enfants pour y revenir en 1961. C'est de la perspective d'épouse et de mère qu'elle décrit sa vie au Canada et réfléchit aux similitudes et différences culturelles ainsi qu'aux conflits et processus d'apprentissage qui sont engendrés par sa situation dans la diaspora. Ainsi elle a recours à de multiples occasions à des motifs narratifs établis, issus de la phase coloniale du Canada, tels que la dureté de la vie de pionnier, l'état de dépendance vis-à-vis des indigènes et la loyauté envers la patrie. De par ces stratégies narratives, elle occulte ses expériences de l'étrangéité, elle légitime sa propre présence au Canada et son exigence d'acceptation en tant qu'anglo-canadienne. Dans cette transformation identitaire, on note à quel point, bien après même la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les carcans coloniaux imprégnèrent la construction de la réalité cana-*

dienne à travers les migrants britanniques, car Gillies Brown reproduit dans une forme modernisée mais relativement intacte, une sentimentalité de colon (post)coloniale.

Introduction: Unpalatable Subjects

Margaret Gillies Brown's story of her migration to Canada in 1959 and return to Scotland two years later relates a kind of im/migrant¹ experience which has not been at the core of academic interest. The 1950s saw large numbers of people from different parts of the world entering Canada, including many continental Europeans and considerable numbers of emigrants from the UK (Messamore 2004, 4). After the 1967 and 1976 immigration regulations, immigration to Canada diversified. While some immigrant groups such as those from various Eastern European and Asian countries have received considerable attention from scholars as well as writers, little has been written about recent British immigrants' experiences. For several reasons, it seems as if they have not fitted the patterns of current debates, and I suspect several reasons for this.

Firstly, historiographical and other writing on Scottish emigration to Canada has mainly focused on the Highlanders and only recently acknowledged the diversity of Scottish emigration (Harper 2004, 15-18). Gillies Brown's life story, the story of middle-class Lowland Scots temporarily migrating to Canada, represents a departure from the dominant historical narratives of Scottish emigration.

Secondly, Gillies Brown's texts are located in an era and ethnic configuration that has been rather unpopular among critics. To some extent, her autobiographical writings follow the well-trodden path laid out by, for example, Catharine Parr Traill's and Susanna Moodie's early-19th-century pioneer women's life writings, which have been analysed in the context of gender, the complexities of colonial identities and the process of the formation of Canadian identity and nationhood. In the 1950s, however, Canada had been explored; it was a consolidated democratic nation within the Commonwealth and rapidly modernising. Although it was still in need of immigrant labour and, compared with Britain, still thought to offer opportunity and adventure, it was no longer an obvious site for colonial adventures. Therefore narratives of recent British experiences in Canada neither appealed to those who still dreamt of colonial adventures nor those keen on criticising the colonial projects or uncovering strategies of resistance. Nevertheless, I shall argue that post-Second-World-War British im/migrant writers such as Gillies Brown can still be seen as what Gillian Whitlock calls "compromised authors writing out of empire," infected by the

1 The spelling 'im/migrant' indicates that the family originally wanted to immigrate, that is, settle in Canada, but returned to Scotland after only two years, which makes them migrants rather than immigrants.

“struggle, misrecognition and disingenuous compliance” which characterise colonial encounters (2000, 38). Gillies Brown can be considered to be engaged in processes of invasion, settlement and colonisation as described by Whitlock (2000, 38), not least through her husband Ronald’s last job selling land plots, or acreages, for development. Whitlock uses the term ‘settler subjects’ for the British in Canada (2000, 38), claiming that thinking about settlers has been deeply unfashionable in post-colonialism and that settlers are unpalatable subjects because they often work with, rather than against European models and feature sometimes ambiguous engagements with a history of invasion and dispossession (Whitlock 2000, 41). I will argue that the term ‘settler’ as defined by Whitlock can be applied to Gillies Brown, although its meaning may be slightly modified by 20th-century conditions. She occupies an ambiguous position similar to that of the settler, feeling strongly that she is part of the dominant cultural group in Canada and, at the same time, an immigrant and outsider, exploited by Canadian farmers and struggling to adapt to Canadian ways of living. The family also suffers from the loss of status because they came from the Scottish middle classes. But in Canada, the job given to the husband renders them members of the labouring classes, with wages hardly granting the family’s subsistence. Thus they participate in both the dominant (British) culture and the experience of the subaltern, which places them somewhere outside the binary opposition of coloniser and colonised, British Canadian and immigrant. Gillies Brown has to construct her sense of self in the middle of these tensions and does so from an uncertain, volatile position in which tradition and stability have been suspended. Such autobiographical writing does not proffer itself to those thinking in binary oppositions and looking for clear imbalances of power to criticise.

The same irregularities and complexities arise if one attempts to describe Gillies Brown’s position in terms of diaspora. The characteristics of diaspora as outlined, for example, by Cohen (1996), do apply to British immigrants, but with the modification that the British immigrant in Canada assumes a cultural and ideological congruence with the receiving culture. Nevertheless, this particularly strong identification with the host culture is called into question by occasional cultural clashes caused by the diasporic situation, the uncertain status of the immigrant and perceived cultural differences. These specific irregularities of the position of the modern immigrant-settler may have marginalised texts like Gillies Brown’s but also make them all the more intriguing.

Who, then, is Margaret Gillies Brown?

Before I turn to a close reading of the text, I will sketch the main events in her and her family’s life as she presents them in the two parts of her autobiography. Born in the 1930s as the daughter of a schoolteacher, Gillies Brown trains to be a nurse and at twenty marries a farmer’s son, Ronald. He does not get on well with his father, so

the couple decide to go to Canada, with their three young sons. When they leave Scotland in February 1959, she is pregnant with her fourth child, which she has in Canada, where she later also gives birth to her fifth. Their sponsor is a railroad company, and upon their arrival they are placed with a dairy farmer near Red Deer, Alberta, where Ronald has to do all kinds of farm work. After a few months and a visit by a representative of their sponsors, they are shifted to a mixed farm near Sandyhills, where Ronald works till the harvest is over and the work dries up. Since their sponsors are slow to help, the family make their own decision to move to Edmonton, where Ronald finds work at an estate agency. After two years, when Ronald's father is getting old and wants to pass on the family farm, the family return to Scotland, take over the farm and have two more children, giving them seven. After her husband dies years later, she marries one of her boarders from her Canadian time. Almost all of her children go through a phase of wanderlust, travel and work in Canada but finally return to the farm and family economy. Retired, she and her second husband take a long trip to Canada to see, among others, the old places, Sandyhills and Edmonton.

Her life story was published in two volumes, the first one covering her two years in Canada, from their preparations for leaving Scotland to their departure from Canada. The second volume recounts her family's life back in Scotland and her and her second husband's later trip down memory lane through Canada. The two volumes were issued by the Scottish publisher Argyll in 1997 and 1999 and marketed as 'Travel/Scottish Interest', and particularly the first volume set in Canada was considered a success, well received not only in Scotland but also in Canada, as Gillies Brown herself claims (1999, 199, 223).

Autobiography and the Dominion Diaspora

The classification of Gillies Brown's autobiography by her publisher as travel literature seems justified for two reasons – firstly, the family move several times in Canada, and secondly, travel writing has a clear affinity to autobiography since both involve personal journeys narrated in the first person (Moore-Gilbert 2009, 83). Nevertheless, there are fundamental differences. Following Philippe Lejeune's notion, I understand by autobiography a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his[/her] own existence, where the focus is his[/her] individual life, in particular the story of his[/her] personality" (Lejeune 1989, 4). A real person is "a person whose existence is certified by vital statistics," and his/her proper name is "the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person" (Lejeune 1989, 11). Nevertheless, recent research has ascertained that human autobiographical memory is a constructive, dynamic process and has rejected any mechanistic storage-retrieval model (e.g. Wägenbaur, 1998).

It has been widely acknowledged that the autobiographical 'I' forms his/her narrative with the help of existing conceptual and discursive models of life and narratives, thereby investing the events of a life with meaning. Gillies Brown's life writing has certainly been informed by previous writing about Canada, and this assumption is confirmed by her self-presentation as a well-read person and her pride in providing snippets of Canadian history. On the other hand, as Christiane Harzig (2006, 9) points out, the form of memories is determined by the mental structures of the present in which social groups define what is worth being remembered, and individuals identify with, and use, the patterns of memories generated by groups. In the case of Gillies Brown, this means that even in the 1990s, when she is writing her life story, there is a persisting interest in what has been called settler narratives, with all their ambiguities about British and Canadian identities. This, then, indicates that the empire and its aftermath still resonate in British society and remain a source of tensions and contradictions. In the particular case of the dominions, that is, the former colonies of (white) settlement such as Canada, a British identity became hegemonic while at the same time political autonomy from Britain was sought and granted in a complex historical process in which a vast variety of factors interacted. The relationship between Britain and the "dominion diaspora" (Cohen 1994, 17) was cemented by ties of kinship, visits, tourism and other links, but has also been challenged by the geopolitical developments of the past decades. Both aspects of the relationship can account for the continuing interest in those ties, to which Gillies Brown's life story testifies. Cohen also emphasises the fuzziness of the boundaries between Britain and the dominions, and of racial boundaries, which shapes the historical situation which immigrants encounter in the late 1950s.

Social and Political Contexts

The situation in Canada at the time of Gillies Brown's stay, 1959-1961, deserves a closer look as it explains some of the family's experience. Freda Hawkins claims that immediate post-war policies gave immigration a higher priority for Canada. From 1955-1958, the country received the largest stream of emigrants from the UK (Hollingsworth 1970, 119). Immigration policy as presented to the Canadian House of Commons "envisaged selective immigration as an instrument of population growth and economic development, at a rate consistent with absorptive capacity" (Hawkins 1988, 117f.). By favouring European immigrants, no fundamental alteration would be made in the character of the population, and especially Asian immigration was deemed undesirable. Therefore the Immigration Act of 1952 permitted the entry of large numbers of European immigrants but limited Asian immigration. It turned out to be a poor piece of legislation which was difficult to administer; immigration operations did not develop harmoniously, and the problems of immigration and possible solutions were not communicated to the public.

By 1957, specific problems had come to a head. For example, the belief in the desirability of sponsored immigration from traditional European sources prevailed although there were not enough sponsors for European immigrants and applications piled up in the European offices. The Immigration Act of 1952 needed revision, especially insofar as it was discriminatory against non-Europeans; furthermore, illegal Chinese immigration out of Hong Kong demanded attention (Hawkins 1988, 119). The racialisation of the farm labour market, that is, the preference for Europeans regardless of their skills, made it even more difficult for Canadian authorities to supply the required seasonal labour (Satzewich 1991, 188-199). From 1957 onwards, levels of unemployment rose especially among young and unskilled people, which led to a new emphasis on skills in the 1961 immigration regulations (Satzewich 1991, 139). Lastly, it should be mentioned that the seasonal character of the demand for farm labour in Canadian agriculture posed special strains on both employers and im/migrant labour (cf. Satzewich 1991).

A study of Scottish im/migrants in Canada showed that as a result of these problems, many post-war immigrants found their qualifications discounted, had to accept jobs inferior to those they had left (Elliott 1997, 199) and thus faced downward social mobility, but they tried to counter their loss of status by exploiting their social and cultural capital. Others responded by engaging in return migration, and temporary migration partly replaced permanent migration. The recognition and systematic investigation of temporary and return migration have only just started (Harper 2005; McCarthy 2007, 208-216).

Im/migrants' life stories like Gillies Brown's present an individual life at the intersection of complex factors, from personal to global. Such factors reach from individual psychological dispositions through configurations of gender to racialised immigration policies in Canada, and imperial ideas and British racial attitudes on the Scottish side.

Approaches to the Text

Gillies Brown's life story, like any other, allows many different readings. It can be read as a woman's heart-warming story of her adventure abroad and how she kept her family going through times of hardship. Since Gillies Brown is absorbed by, and prides herself in, her roles as mother, wife and everybody's helpmate, her narrative can be read as a story of domesticity transplanted and maintained. Although Gillies Brown's gendered role and self-image are inseparably linked to her perception of Canada, they only form the background of my argument. Nor will I address issues arising under the recently popular term of 'transnationalism', which stands for the building of social fields linking together country of origin and country of settlement (McCarthy 2007, 4-5). Such issues would involve Gillies Brown's contacts to other family members in Canada, the USA and back home, and to fellow British

im/migrants. Again, her story has all of this, but these issues will not be considered in detail because they have little bearing on Gillies Brown's ambiguous relationship to what she experiences as 'Canadianness'. Nevertheless, since postcolonial relations can be localised in encounters and settlers establish their selves through the narration of such encounters, it ensues that the self is scripted in relation to others, through oppositions and similarities, intimacies and distinctions, association and dissociation (Whitlock 2000, 43).

Gillies Brown constructs her diasporic self to a large extent through cultural comparisons, that is, cognitive and discursive acts by which she, the auto/biographer², produces a narrative that is implicitly and explicitly comparing Canadian and Scottish culture as well as reflecting Canadian attitudes to immigrants. Her dynamic relationship to her host society and her uncertainty about what is Self and what is Other³ are often expressed in comparisons, which will be read as attempts to clarify her awkward position with regard to dominant Canadian culture and society in the 1950s and her own Britishness and Scottishness. Furthermore, I will investigate if and how Gillies Brown experiences Canadian attitudes towards (national) Others. The question arises if she feels at all that she is, and is seen as, a Canadian Other. The strategies and issues of her comparisons will be at the core of my analysis.

My approach to the text has to take into account that it is an auto/biography. The im/migrant auto/biographical 'I' constructs herself and her family as agents (not victims). Gillies Brown struggles to locate herself and her family in her new life as she structures and interprets her experience with Canadians and their attitudes towards herself (as Other). A special feature of her interpretations is that they are informed by her conviction that there are universal human (and especially feminine) attitudes and experiences which she shares with Canadians and other im/migrants. When she positions herself as a migrant, legitimises her presence in Canada and interprets her hardship, she draws on models provided by Scottish-Canadian history.

Textual Analysis: Negotiating Otherness

Envisioning Canadian Expectations, Locating the Self

In her life narrative, Gillies Brown describes how, soon after her arrival in Alberta, she tries to determine her own and her family's place in the Canadian agricultural economy. She writes about her husband's first boss, a dairy farmer: "To him, we must

2 The spelling of 'auto/biography' was proposed by Liz Stanley, suggesting that any self-life writing involved writing the lives of others, that is, 'biography' (Stanley 1992).

3 In this paper, the capitalised abstract noun 'Other' and derivatives such as 'Otherness' are used to denote the construct of a distinct cultural identity, which is usually part of a binary opposition.

have looked very British and odd" (37), and she adds later, "He hadn't expected a British family – a slimly-built man dressed in British clothes, looking more like a teacher, lawyer or businessman than a farm worker with a wife who [...] would be accustomed to a much better way of life than he could or would be prepared to offer" (40). In this passage, Gillies Brown engages in a complex process of Othering. By speculating about Muller's perception of her own family as a (British) Other, she confirms her own feelings of difference from the Canadian farmer. This feeling of differences, nevertheless, is not based as much on nationality as it is on class. Gillies Brown notices the contradiction between her British middle-class appearance and self-perception and her family's lower-class location in the Canadian economic and class system, in which Ronald as a farm labourer with a low income and little control over his work counts among the lowest ranks. To compensate for the humiliating living conditions, Gillies Brown cultivates a feeling of superiority based on markers of British middle-class identity.

In this context, Gillies Brown employs another strategy to mark her social location, which is, again, relational. She reports that Muller's previous immigrants had been "tough Ukrainian peasants accustomed to hard work, long hours and taking orders" and that they "would have been satisfied with anything Muller cared to give them" (40). She sets her own family apart from other, 'more foreign' farm labourers, who would have been right for the tough job while the Gillieses, she insinuates, had been made for a better life. She raises her own position by assigning non-British immigrants a lower rank due to their supposedly lower expectations of life. In her struggle to resolve the contradictions she encounters, she puts her finger on a sore spot of Canadian immigration policy at the time. This policy favoured British immigrants like the Gillieses along ideological lines but they were poorly suited for the hard work, low pay, basic living conditions and insecure job prospects Alberta's farmers offered. Gillies Brown's reasoning reveals that their social location as 'settlers' was insecure and marked by contradictions.

Gillies Brown elaborates on the issue of Canadian immigration policies, speculating that farmer Muller may not have been aware of the policy at that time for the western states – which she feels she knows about, at least with hindsight. Proudly she explains the Canadian policy to her readers:

This was to step up the settling of English-speaking people who could read and write in order to redress the balance of the influx of so many sometimes illiterate peasants speaking different languages and having different cultures. These peoples in the past had been encouraged to leave their own troubled countries with the lure of free land on the uninhabited prairies in the far west. The tendency for them to form colonies establishing, on Canadian soil, their own customs, methods and traditions was worrying to the authorities. The men in power now were

anxious to make a unified people living under one flag and allowing allegiance only to one – the flag of Canada. (Gillies Brown 1997, 40)

This statement stands out for its blunt colonialism and affirmation of British racial and cultural superiority. Gillies Brown here identifies, and identifies with, those Canadian attitudes and policies that reinforce her own superiority. She claims that the future of Canada depends on the civilising, stabilising and homogenising impact of British immigrants like herself, which puts her in the position of being needed and wanted and belonging to the most desirable group of immigrants from a Canadian perspective. She presupposes congruence of British and Canadian interest but at the same time pretends that it is all about Canada. Thus she can assign her family a role in the (imperial) project of keeping Canadian culture British by balancing out the supposedly culturally inferior and divisive influences of other immigrant groups. Thus she utilises Canadian political rhetoric of the 1950s to empower herself and legitimise her own mission to Canada. Gillies Brown can be seen as an illustration of how the Canadian 'Anglo-Saxonism' of the time appealed to British immigrants and compensated them for the severe hardship many of them faced. In this instance, her Scottishness has completely dissolved in her Britishness. Nevertheless, her statement about the "settling of English-speaking people" stands in stark contrast to her experience in Edmonton, where she rents a flat from a Ukrainian and enjoys support from several non-British immigrant women. These unresolved dissonances can be read as part of the unstable position of the settler, but they can also be understood through the various narrative instances speaking in the text. In *Far from the Rowan Tree*, Gillies Brown tries to recreate her responses to Canada on her arrival and in the course of her life in Canada. Nevertheless, at various points the mature female writer of the 1990s laces her memories of her young womanhood with comments and additional information which express the knowledge and views she has more than thirty years later. With regard to her British ethnocentrism and patriotism, she is probably trying to write down what she recalls as her feelings at the time and, in this case, not overwriting them with the views of the subsequent age of multiculturalism. The mingling of the various writerly instances may account for some inconsistencies.

The Queen's visit to Sandyhills is described in detail by Gillies Brown (1997, 145-147), and she still remembers it on her trip down memory lane to Canada decades later (1999, 223). Gillies Brown reports that Canadians belonging to ethnic groups other than British opposed the Queen's visit, feeling a kind of domination by Britain, however slight, and regarding themselves as totally Canadian, but other Canadians felt it made them different and separate from U.S. Americans. Their employer had "a strong loyalist attitude to the British Royal family. Generations back his forebears were British. Therefore in a sense, he still felt British as well as being Canadian" (1997, 147). As they all went to see the Queen, Scottishness, Britishness and Canadianness

merged into one happy identity, with – Gillies Brown’s – British identity emerging superior in the body of the Queen.

Perceptions of Canadian Institutions’ Attitudes towards Immigrants

Gillies Brown relates several episodes which demonstrate that the Canadian authorities care about their new British immigrants. The railway company that had sponsored the Gillieses sends a man to check on them, who is reported to say: “My company always send someone to call on new immigrants [...] to see how they are making out.” Although he brushes aside complaints about low pay, long hours and lack of plumbing, he criticises the condition of the house as not up to their standards at all (Gillies Brown 1997, 72) and shifts them to a mixed farm in Sandyhills, east of Edmonton, where conditions are slightly better. But when Ronald is offered only half pay in winter and his next employer does not show up, he is finished with the sponsors and finds a job himself. These episodes testify to the care with which new British immigrants are treated, but also to the difficult situation in the Canadian farm labour market as described above; nevertheless, they end with a celebration of superior British self-reliance.

Canadian attitudes also surface in another episode. Gillies Brown is to stay in hospital for her confinement and pay for it what she feels to be a lot of money, but her doctor is of Scottish descent and quite compassionate. Therefore, within two weeks, he succeeds in having Alberta change its law to enable her to have a free-of-charge hospital birth. It used to require nine months of residence in Alberta to be eligible for free hospitalization, and her doctor explains:

“The new law will state that if you are an authentic immigrant coming from another country, you are entitled to free hospitalization from the time you arrive. Kind of Alberta to change its laws for you, isn’t it?” (Gillies Brown 1997, 106-107)

Gillies Brown is “touched” by Alberta’s kindness since such actions by Canadian institutions make her feel relevant and welcome and appear to confirm her belief that she and her family are desirable immigrants.

A mother of four, she is similarly enchanted by the Canadian attitude towards children. She observes that “Canadians were kind to children” (131) and reflects that “Canada, in her attempt to fill up the wide open spaces, encouraged the bearing of children. Consequently, there were some large families about” (140); and she quotes her landlady saying, “Children are looked at as a useful crop in Alberta. We need people” (178). Her statements show how her pride as a mother coincides with her eagerness to contribute to the completion of the colonial project and the strengthening of the ‘superior’ British element of Canadian culture. All three aspects of her identity reinforce each other.

The vulnerable position of new immigrants manifests itself in the frequency with which they encounter, and suffer under, 'bad bosses'. Ronald always has to work for demanding, difficult and even dangerous bosses. He feels he is kept prisoner by his first boss (52). A Canadian friend talks about the reasons: "The trouble is it sure is tough for immigrants. You tend to get the bad bosses, those that no one else will work for" (59). Farm labour had been a problematic part of the Canadian economy in any case (cf. Satzewich 1991), but its instability affected immigrants even more than others. Nevertheless, Gillies Brown's explanation of their difficulties with employers appears to rationalise this negative aspect of immigrant life.

Perceiving Difference and Exclusion

In their daily business with Canadians, the Gillieses observe that "farmers don't seem to have a sense of pride or ownership about their places" (Gillies Brown 1997, 95) but rather see them as somewhere to scrape a living or make money, then sell and move to the cities. In contrast, the Gillieses' family farm in Scotland, which had been in the family for generations, is to them a treasured memory and a haven to return to, promising safety and stability (239). The ownership of the soil had been contested throughout Scottish history and had assumed a high symbolic value. In Gillies Brown's subjective situation, the Canadian (settler) attitude towards the land does not have much appeal, and as a mother of five, she prefers stability over mobility. Her reflection on attitudes towards the land may partly function as an explanation of their later return to Scotland, and the theme of the love of the land in Scotland resurfaces in the second part of her autobiography (1999, 98).

Other differences the Gillieses notice concern the ease with which Canadians include immigrants and encourage them to participate in community life (Gillies Brown 1997, 126) and the egalitarian spirit which makes them treat each other as equal, independent of their income and social standing. Gillies Brown feels that these features distinguished Canada clearly from 1950s Scotland (140). The frequent suspension of the old class boundaries in the new country is one of the advantages which settlers have enjoyed traditionally and which has compensated them for the coldness, harshness and loneliness of the land (40). Gillies Brown also remarks on differences of the language such as accent, a high degree of informality and a different vocabulary, but these differences are too small to affect her feeling of a shared language, and she does not fail to ridicule non-British immigrants' accents (178; 183).

A major complaint runs through Gillies Brown's tales of her early days in Canada – the complaint that no one cares to give them information above the absolute minimum. Ronald's first employer never gives him "much more information about anything other than what he wanted him to do" (1997, 95). In her isolation she is unable to gather information about the geographical, social and economic structure of the world outside the farm and depends on chance visitors for snippets of information. Therefore, her first visitor, a woman from Jehovah's Witnesses, receives an unsus-

pectedly warm welcome and has to answer dozens of questions (50). A local couple, who once give Ronald a lift on his way to town, finally provide her with some more information – that because of bad water, coffee is more popular than tea, that the good flour is the reason for lots of baking (58) and other bits of information valuable to the housewife. Gillies Brown's initial sense of spatial and social isolation is enhanced by the lack of communication, which is a well-known aspect of the female experience of migration to rural Canada, and it affects life even in the late 1950s. Like other immigrant women before her, she takes up writing "to alleviate the loneliness caused by lack of adult companionship" (113). Her spatial-social isolation is, in her case and at that time, a metaphor for the family's immigrant status with the resulting limited participation in social exchange.

Shared Patterns of Life, Past and Present

Canadian history is an area where Gillies Brown as a writer assumes some authority and which allows us more insights into her perception of her ambiguous settler identity. Because she identifies strongly with her Scottish roots, she resorts to the experience of the Scottish settlers of the 19th century as her model. In her life writing, she legitimises her presence in Canada by describing herself as someone following a historical model set up by her predecessors, or ancestors in a wide sense, in the past. For example, when reporting a family visit to the ruins of a fort, she describes it as the place from where "David Thomson (a Scotsman) [...] set out to discover the Columbia river" (77).⁴ This way she writes Canadian history as Scottish history, thereby relating it to her own history and legitimising her role in Canada as part of the colonial legacy.

Furthermore, Gillies Brown reflects on the experiences of the first Scottish settlers in Alberta, the ones driven out of Scotland by the Highland clearances, and their hardships. This aspect of the British settlement of Canada had already received much attention from writers as well as scholars, and the emigration following the Highland clearances had become a central myth in British Canadian history (e.g. Basu 2005, 142-143). In her three-page account (1997, 89-91) of the first settlers' experiences, Gillies Brown offers few facts. Instead, she describes her personal vision (probably informed by her readings) of what the settlers must have seen, heard, thought and felt. She also employs, implicitly and explicitly, comparisons between the past and her present, such as, "If we grumbled about no furniture, they had no house and would have to build one [...]" (90). In this case, she puts her own problems in proportion by comparing them with the more difficult conditions met by 19th-century immigrants. She also dramatises, for example, what first settlers would have had to endure from insects, "which gave a far nastier bite than any midge from

4 It should be noted that David Thompson was not a Scotsman but born in England to Welsh parents. Gillies Brown may have taken him for Scottish because the North West Company, for which he explored the North American West, was mainly run by Scotsmen.

the glens or hillsides of Scotland" (90), thus highlighting their everyday heroism. Her view of pioneer life can best be described as 'romanticised hardship,' which may also characterise her own retrospective assessment of her Canadian years. Nevertheless, by envisioning mundane details of the settler experience, she assumes the authority of a fellow settler, partly speaking out of her own experience and presenting herself as a true modern pioneer woman, if mainly one of the mind. By casting some aspects of her own life in what she sees as a mould formed by the first Scottish settlers, she assigns herself a legitimate place in Canadian history and society. Furthermore, Gillies Brown idealises and romanticises the historical relationship between First Nations Canadians and settlers. She talks about cruel Indians who, nevertheless, sometimes "were gentle and kind, helping them [the Scottish settlers] in their distress" (91). The dependence of immigrants on natives for survival is presented implicitly as a pattern for Gillies Brown's own life. Again, history is presented as a model for the present, naturalising and legitimising Gillies Brown's presence in Canada.

Universal Femininity

Besides the romanticised model of pioneer life, which Gillies Brown found in the imagined lives of 19th century Scottish emigrants and adapted, she employs another concept to reduce the Otherness of Canada, and that is the idea of universal female solidarity and empathy. She muses about a tea with "the girls of Sandyhills W.A." to which their second employer's wife invites her:

Afternoon tea in the Jacobs' prairie house with the rural ladies of Sandyhills was very like afternoon tea with the rural ladies of the W.R.I. at home. Women the world over will always have things in common to talk about. My new baby and I brought a brightness to the occasion [...].
(111)

Gillies Brown feels united with Canadian women on the basis of shared concepts of gender and earns their approval through her love of her children and her pride in a neat home and good housekeeping. When she is pregnant and paints her kitchen, Ronald's employer's wife comes by, and Gillies Brown interprets her behaviour: "Her eyes danced with the same pleasure as mine. Did I detect a hint of admiration in them? Something I knew would be hard to come by in this difficult land" (98). What she shares with these women are middle-class family values and middle-class domesticity. Gillies Brown maintains that these conventions of femininity enjoy universal approval, and presents them as another indication of the perceived cultural sameness of Britain and Canada. The acceptance her version of femininity appears to find among Canadian women can be read as an indication of the crucial role of gender norms for the stabilisation of a diasporic identity.

Concluding the Journey

Back home, the Gillies Browns keep comparing their life in Scotland with life in Canada. The reader of the second part of her life story will notice that certain topics from the first volume recur and that Canada has become a constant presence in their lives back home. She repeatedly refers to the Canadians' love of children and support of immigrants but lack of love of the land, the spectacular Canadian nature and her own utter isolation after their arrival. Furthermore, Gillies Brown presents some of her attitudes as having been shaped by life in Canada, such as accepting limited control over one's life, becoming self-reliant and allowing a bit of fatalism. Like other returning migrants before them, the Gillieses take home with them a widened and fresh perspective on their native country but also re-adapt easily to the Scottish way of life, hardly ever challenging the order of things at home. They carry their settler perspective with them, almost habitually comparing aspects of home life with their Canadian experience, and the family members keep travelling to Canada. The elderly couple travels out of nostalgia, and the children go to find independence, to work and explore the country in good pioneer spirit. I would argue that these recurring comparisons are an expression of the diasporic identity, which has lastingly, though selectively and unevenly, shaped the migrants' interpretation of their world and their perceptions of their own position in it.

In her account of her years in Canada, Gillies Brown over/writes her experience of Canadian life with her whole – distinctly colonialist – world view, which she had grown up with in the 1940s and 1950s, when the idea of empire had wide currency. She uses select references to Canadian immigration history and policies to legitimise her presence in Canada and give her experience a mythical dimension beyond individual fate. In doing so, she fully endorses the Scottish master narrative of the settlement of Canada, never addressing the inconsistencies and contradictions between British, Scottish and Canadian identities. By suggesting parallels between 19th-century Scottish pioneers' life and her own, she gives meaning to her own hardship and compensates for it through an ideology of cultural-social-racial superiority, an ideology which classifies her as a desirable emigrant who embodies the dominant culture and is needed to strengthen Canada's British identity. Her life writing is not a mere documentation but rather a personal view in which she employs social and historical facts to define her position in Canada favourably. Shared British-Canadian attitudes such as Anglo-Saxonism, the conviction of British superiority, mild royalism and middle-class concepts of femininity serve to reduce or overcome the barriers of cultural Otherness in her narrative so that she feels she can fully embrace this land. Considering that she positioned herself as a 'settler subject', it comes as no surprise that she is able to break this embrace without hesitation at the prospect of a return to Scotland, but it leaves its impression on her for the rest of her life.

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