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Questions of Recognition? Critical Investigations of Citizenship and Culture in Multicultural Canadian Writing

Zusammenfassung

Im Kontext der Neuentdeckung und Diversifizierung von Staatsbürgerschaftskonzepten in den 1990er Jahren ist ‚cultural citizenship‘ zu einem Schlagwort geworden. Die entsprechenden Debatten gewannen zunehmend an Bedeutung durch die wachsende Mobilität von Menschen, Gütern und Ideen, die die Fragen nach den Grundlagen und Grenzen von Gesellschaften sowie nach individuellen und Gruppenrechten noch dringlicher werden ließ.

Die wiederbelebte Bedeutung von Konzepten von ‚citizenship‘ ging zeitgleich einher mit dem Höhepunkt der Debatten um Ethnizität, Identität und Identitätspolitik in den Kulturwissenschaften. Einen zentralen philosophischen Rahmen bildete dabei die Debatte um individuelle und kollektive Anerkennung. Diese Fragen spielen eine wichtige Rolle für das kontextsensitive Verständnis multikultureller Literaturen, nicht nur in den 1990er Jahren, sondern auch im Hinblick auf die jüngeren Diskussionen über Literatur und ‚cultural citizenship‘.

Mit Blick auf ausgewählte Beispiele aus der kanadischen Gegenwartsliteratur nimmt dieser Beitrag die philosophischen Debatten zum Ausgangspunkt, um zu zeigen, wie multikulturelle Literaturen in Kanada einen signifikanten Beitrag zu diesen Fragen leisten können. Umgekehrt ermöglichen die philosophischen Diskussionen ein besseres Verständnis davon, wie literarische Texte gesellschaftliche Diskurse von Identität und Zugehörigkeit aufgreifen.

Résumé

Dans le contexte de la redécouverte et de la diversification des concepts de citoyenneté dans les années quatre-vingt-dix, la citoyenneté culturelle est devenue un mot-clé. Les débats correspondants ont gagné de plus en plus d'importance à cause de la mobilité croissante des hommes, des marchandises et des idées. Pour ces raisons, les questions sur les fondements et les limites des sociétés ainsi que les questions sur les droits individuels et collectifs sont devenues plus pressantes que jamais.

Ce réveil des conceptions de la citoyenneté ne coïncidait pas par hasard avec l'apogée des discussions dans le domaine des études culturelles concernant l'ethnicité, l'identité et la politique d'identité. C'est surtout le débat sur la reconnaissance individuelle et collective qui constituait le cadre philosophique principal. Ces questions ont joué un rôle important pour la compréhension contextuelle de textes multiculturels non seulement dans les années quatre-vingt-dix, mais aussi dans les discussions récentes sur la littérature et la citoyenneté culturelle.

En utilisant des morceaux choisis de la littérature contemporaine canadienne, cet essai prend comme point de départ les débats philosophiques pour montrer comment les littératures multiculturelles du Canada peuvent contribuer, de manière significative, aux questions évoquées ci-dessus. Inversement, le cadre philosophique permet de mieux comprendre comment les textes littéraires interviennent dans des discours de la société sur l'identité et sur l'appartenance.

Since the early 1990s, debates about 'citizenship' have paid increasing attention to the ways in which the term and different concepts of belonging and participation are both politically and culturally highly contested – and how this is being reflected not only in political discussions, but also in literary texts, particularly in the context of multicultural writing. In Joy Kogawa's *Emily Kato*, a novel about the Japanese Canadian redress movement which in the 1980s had pushed the Canadian government to acknowledge and compensate for the injustices done to Japanese Canadians during and immediately after World War II, one of the characters, Eugenia, states in a sermon:

Were Canadian citizens – Japanese Canadian citizens – more loyal to Japan than to Canada? No, they were not. They were, they are as Canadian as are we all. The 'we-ness' I refer to is that of citizenship. We're connected to the past as citizens of this country. We citizens betrayed our fellow citizens and we betrayed the meaning of citizenship. (Kogawa 2005, 150-151)

This passage lists a number of central issues in hegemonic citizenship discourses: loyalty to a particular country or society, the 'we-ness' ideally created by membership in the national collective, but also the centrality of history and memory. At the same time, it touches upon the possibility of betrayal, and the novel not accidentally uses this highly emotionalized term – a possibility of betrayal not only committed by citizens against their country, but a betrayal of values that can be enacted by the national collective and its institutions upon members of this collective. By using this term, Eugenia refers to the dislocation, dispossession, dispersal, and 'repatriation' of Japanese Canadian citizens in the 1940s, but it is also the refusal of the majority population to remember and acknowledge this injustice as part of national

memory.¹ Betrayal, therefore, affects not only the particular group whose citizenship rights have been violated in the past, but it concerns the national community as a whole, since it has violated the very principles on which this “imagined community” of the nation (Anderson 1991) claims to be founded; the refusal to regard this historical injustice against Japanese Canadians as a question concerning all citizens only further perpetuates this violation.

Emily Kato was originally published in 1992 as *Itsuka* and republished in its heavily revised present form in 2005; the publication history is of importance since the different versions of the novel present a link between two time periods in which questions of citizenship have regained theoretical and political currency: the early 1990s that saw a cultural turn with their focus on identity politics; and the post-9/11 period that raised renewed concerns about the racialization of belonging, particularly with regard to the Muslim populations within Western countries.

Besides the question of memory, history, and nation, the novel highlights yet another aspect that is central for current debates on citizenship and the ways in which literary texts take up and contribute to this debate. While the main issue of *Emily Kato* (and its earlier version) is the struggle for an acknowledgement of the injustice done to Japanese Canadians in the past by the government, part of this struggle happens *within* the Japanese Canadian community itself. This internal debate revolves around the question of who can represent the community and in which form the desired acknowledgement should take place: one group wants it to be purely symbolic, another additionally demands financial compensation for lost property and opportunities; the two factions accuse one another of timid assimilationism or, respectively, of greed. Underlying here, besides the obvious and painful struggle for community leadership, is yet another question central to present citizenship debates: the question of recognition.

In the following, I would like to take these two key terms – citizenship and recognition – as a starting point to, admittedly sketchily, investigate the potential contributions of multicultural anglophone literatures in Canada to the debate around social, political, and cultural belonging and societal arrangements; in turn, the philosophical debates may help explain the parameters along which literary texts formulate their specific – political and aesthetic – interventions.

‘Democratic Iterations’: literature, citizenship, and public argument

Sophie McCall and David Chariandy have recently highlighted the double-edged nature of citizenship as “a crucial site in the promotion of democracy and social justice” on the one hand, and as a concept of potential coercion on the other (Chariandy/McCall 2008, 5). The former refers to ‘citizenship’ as a concept of increasing

1 For detailed discussions of the treatment of Japanese Canadians before, during, and after World War II and of the 1980s redress movement see for instance Adachi 1976; Miki 2005; Sunahara 1981.

inclusion into a (usually, but not necessarily, national) collective, both in terms of who is being defined as a citizen and of the specific rights this status entails. The latter aspect of coercion points to the forced inclusion of cultural groups that, as in the case of many indigenous peoples in Canada, did not want to 'belong', since this meant giving up a number of cultural rights and traditions (e.g. Dennis 1997); it also highlights the often implicit citizenship norms, the expectations of "civic fitness" (Banerjee 2009) that leads to the abrogation of the rights of those not deemed 'fit' for the obligations of citizenship. In either case, notions of citizenship, in Canada and elsewhere, are closely interwoven with struggles over not only political, but also cultural belonging, values, and forms of recognition.

These struggles, as my initial example illustrates and as will be shown in more detail below, are taken up in literary texts – not necessarily to mirror larger social, cultural, and political debates (although they are occasionally seen as doing that, too), but to actively participate in these controversial exchanges. This participation is neither necessarily oppositional nor can it be abstracted from the implication of literature and its institutionalizations in existing power structures.² Smaro Kamboureli points to this difficult position when she argues that "literature has been mobilized as a discourse that, no matter the diversity of its particular aesthetic and formal configurations, has served the geopolitical and socio-cultural ends of institutions that are often at odds with what it sets out to accomplish" (Kamboureli 2007, vii-viii). Thus, "literature functions as a sphere of public debates, but is never fully harmonized with them, thus registering the limits of cultural knowledge and politics" (Kamboureli 2007, viii). Given this ambivalent and often contradictory position, I suggest to see the 'political work of culture' as part of what philosopher Seyla Benhabib has called 'democratic iterations', that is, as part of

complex processes of public argument, deliberation, and exchange through which universalist rights, claims and principles are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, posited and positioned [...] They not only change established understandings but also transform what passes as the valid or established view of an authoritative precedent. (Benhabib 2004, 179-180)

An iteration, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, is a repetition, a renewal, a repeated performance or assertion; an iteration, however, is never simply an unchanged repetition of an 'original', but necessarily constitutes a modification or even a radical break;³ the processes referred to here, therefore, are seen as deliberately

2 I thank Sneja Gunew for emphasizing this particular point. For their helpful comments on different versions of this essay, I would like to thank Christoph Henke, Kerstin Knopf, Christian Lammert, Victoria Mears, Martin Middeke, Alexandra Schuler, and Christina Wald.

3 Benhabib to some extent draws on Judith Butler's modifications of Jacques Derrida's concept of 'iterability' of the sign. See Butler 1997; Derrida 1988.

drawing on, repeating, or modifying previous utterances – they are part of an exchange, in which sometimes surprising elements are joined to negotiate what recognition, citizenship, culture, and societal participation can or should mean in societies that define themselves as ‘multicultural’.

Taking this as my starting point, I would now like to turn to each of the key terms in more detail before I will shift my analysis to the way in which they contribute to the understanding of how literary texts can be read as participating in larger political debates about citizenship, culture, and belonging.

Citizenship

In 2007, historian Patricia Roy published an account of the struggle of Japanese and Chinese Canadians for full citizenship rights entitled *The Triumph of Citizenship*. In this particular context, the ‘triumph’ refers to the full inclusion of previously excluded ethnic groups in electoral politics, to their equal participation in the political system, and to the potential for a multicultural society in which a national of Canada is indeed recognized as a Canadian citizen with all the rights this entails (cf. Roy 2007, 309). ‘Citizenship’ is here understood in the formal sense of legal status with full rights of political participation. This has undoubtedly been a central issue in Canada for the political struggle from the early 20th century to the late 1940s and, one might even argue, to immigration reforms of the 1960s.

However, with regard to a number of recent definitions of citizenship, this understanding is not nearly as far-reaching as appears necessary in contemporary constellations that are shaped by increasing intra-societal cultural diversity and transnational connections. Following on the one hand public debates about the status of refugees and on the other hand the demands voiced by the ‘new social movements’ of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in Western liberal democracies, concepts of citizenship have had a theoretical renaissance in social science debates since the early 1990s. Conceptions after World War II had reformulated earlier notions of citizenship in complementing its political and legal aspects by foregrounding the importance of the social in the context of emerging post-war welfare states; the discussions since the 1990s, then, have been characterized by the addition of categories very closely linked to the concerns of social movements, in particular the categories of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or, more generally, ‘culture’.

With regard to the linkage between the political work of literature and these theoretical issues, I would like to build my discussion on an understanding of citizenship not in terms of its ‘substance’, that is, the specific rights and duties attached to cultural and political membership, but more generally as “the ways and means by which a society imagines and organizes social membership, political participation, and societal arrangements” (Quaestio 2000, 22; transl. KS). This definition implies, but does not exclusively focus on legal frameworks, state policies, or the individual’s relation to state and nation; by explicitly referring to the act of imagination it includes the possibilities of literature to participate in social discourse, and therefore

to read literary texts as renegotiations and imaginations of alternative models – or as affirmations of existing arrangements, for obviously literature is not always subversive. Understood in this broad sense, this negotiation of citizenship, in which I see literary texts engage, is closely linked to an investigation of the underlying assumptions about belonging and the prerequisites for what counts as a ‘good life’, and thus to the second key term, recognition.

Recognition

Concepts of ‘recognition’ were central to the identity debates of the 1980s and 1990s, and had previously played a role in the discussions around communitarianism (cf. Honneth 1993); they are most notably connected to the philosophical work of Charles Taylor in Canada and that of Axel Honneth in Germany, and provide a foundation of institutionalized multiculturalism. More recently, the political relevance of ‘recognition’ as a concept has become controversial: recognition has been seen as inappropriately trumping issues of redistribution. In this critique, redistribution and recognition are regarded as a dichotomy in which “recognition claims tend to predominate” and contribute to an increasing decentering of “claims for egalitarian redistribution” (Fraser/ Honneth 2003, 8). Recognition here is mainly symbolic, while redistribution is material. In this critical view, to put it bluntly, recognition is seen as an obsolete concept not up to the urgent tasks to be tackled as a result of neoliberal globalization and its blatant social inequalities.⁴

However, there is a number of critics who do not subscribe to the assumption underlying this juxtaposition, namely, that redistribution is material and recognition symbolic; they do not see these two terms as mutually exclusive but rather argue that, philosophically, issues of redistribution have to be contextualized in a larger framework of recognition (cf. Fraser/Honneth 2003; Owen/Tully 2007; with a slightly different focus Isin/Wood 1999). This question is politically and philosophically anything but settled. Rather, it seems that both ethno-cultural diversity and the growing social heterogeneity and economic inequality within Western liberal democracies have *increased* the urgency of recognition debates; and, given the shifting circumstances, recognition is now understood as encompassing, but also as going beyond questions of *cultural* identities and is thus a vital aspect of debates about current understandings of citizenship.

Based on a Hegelian dialectic, theories of recognition rest on an understanding of identities as being created dialogically. The basic assumption is that individual as well as collective identities crucially depend on socially and institutionally embedded forms of mutual recognition; in turn, the denial of recognition can be seen as a

4 Nancy Fraser has more recently reformulated this strict juxtaposition, but insists on a clear analytical distinction between socio-economic and cultural injustices and their respective remedies, which retains the implicit equation of redistribution/economic justice and recognition/cultural justice (cf. Fraser 2008, 18). For a detailed discussion of Fraser’s critique of models of recognition see Fraser/Honneth 2003; Fraser 2008.

violation of fundamental needs, and, depending of the specific context, even human rights. As Charles Taylor puts it in his influential and controversial essay "The Politics of Recognition",

our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor 1994, 25)

This applies to both the individual in what Taylor calls 'the intimate sphere' and to questions of recognition of individuals and groups within the 'public sphere', the sole focus of Taylor's ensuing argument.⁵ Central for his discussion of recognition and societal structures are the specificities of the Canadian context with its politically and culturally highly charged relationships between anglophones and francophones, between indigenous peoples and the non-native majority population, and between recent and older immigrant groups in Canada. 'Recognition' for Taylor is directly tied to the ideal of 'authenticity' – that which is to be recognized as unique in each individual or cultural group (cf. Taylor 1994, 28; Taylor 1991). Recognition of 'authentic' selves demands, accordingly, a recognition of universal capabilities which are expressed in unique cultural ways; thus, a politics of recognition is a politics of difference, of preservation of difference – and for Taylor this difference is basically cultural.⁶

Axel Honneth's understanding of recognition can be read in direct and critical dialogue with Taylor's; equally embedded in a specific historical and political context – post-unification Germany, a societal constellation shaped by massive but culturally unacknowledged immigration – Honneth's concept seeks to elaborate the parameters of social justice. It sets out to map the ways in which recognition would have to be granted in order to counter or prevent different forms of non- or misrecognition and the damages they may cause. Significantly, this is a model that seeks to do without any reference to 'authenticity' and rests rather on a communicative model that entails constant negotiation and change within dialogic situations in the widest sense.

5 Taylor is more explicit about the 'intimate sphere' and recognition in *The Ethic of Authenticity* (1991). For the debates about concepts of multiculturalism, however, this earlier book plays little or no role, it is "The Politics of Recognition" and its focus on the public sphere that remains central to the debate.

6 Taylor's notion of recognition has been heavily criticized, most notably for reifying difference, e.g. through his notion of 'authenticity', a charge that has also been made against institutionalized multiculturalism. See for instance Bhabha 1998; Bannerji 2000.

Instead of the distinction between public and private as endorsed by Taylor, Honneth resorts to Hegel to suggest a tripartite division, a division which “arises from the consideration that subjects in modern societies depend for their identity-formation on three forms of social recognition, based in the sphere-specific principles of love, equal legal treatment, and social esteem” (Fraser/Honneth 2003, 180).⁷ As in Taylor’s concept, individual identity-formation is therefore based on structures of mutual recognition; in contrast to Taylor, however, and in reaction to critics like Nancy Fraser, Honneth argues that recognition does not exclusively concern those identity aspects that have come to dominate the public debate through the demands of the new social movements “for the cultural recognition of their collective identity” (Fraser/Honneth 2003, 111). The aspects he refers to – ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation – coincide with those categories that have had the deepest impact on recent modifications of citizenship concepts. Against the background of a theory of social justice based on the notion of recognition, Honneth then asks “which morally relevant forms of social deprivation and suffering [...] we have to abstract away from in order to arrive at the diagnosis that today we are essentially facing struggles for ‘cultural’ recognition?” (Fraser/Honneth 2003, 118). Honneth’s arguments obviously have to be read in the context of a much broader project than is discussed here. Nevertheless, both his warning not to reduce the suffering of social injustice to those categories that are brought effectively to public attention (central as they undoubtedly are) and the three spheres of recognition he outlines have, I argue, a direct impact on the understanding of literature as a negotiation of what recognition can mean; and all three spheres, not only the second, legal/public one as might be expected, also play a role in the ways in which literatures can be read as negotiating meanings of citizenship. If citizenship is understood as “the ways and means by which a society imagines and organizes social membership, political participation, and societal arrangements” (Quaestio 2000, 22), it becomes clear that legal equality of all formal members of the national collective is a prerequisite for citizenship, but in itself is not necessarily sufficient for all citizen subjects to see themselves as treated appropriately and fairly.

Literary interventions I: claiming citizenship beyond nationality in *Emily Kato*

My initial example, Kogawa’s *Emily Kato*, illustrates how contentious the understanding of full citizenship is, and how much it depends upon acts of recognition on various levels. The protagonists of the novel are all citizens in the legal sense – they are all ‘Canadians’ by birth. This status did not save the older generation from the denial of for instance voting rights; nor did it save them from the violation of those citizenship rights they did possess: even legal ‘citizenship’ in the 1940s in Canada did

⁷ Honneth’s proposed spheres and forms of recognition do overlap; ‘love’, for instance, is *not* understood in an apolitical sense as being a sentiment entirely independent of social and cultural context and power structures (cf. Honneth 1992, in particular 148-225).

not ensure full participation, at least not to citizens of Asian descent (cf. Lee 1976; Miki 2005; Roy 2007; Sunahara 1981). Recognition in the sphere of “equal legal treatment”, to refer to Honneth’s distinction, was denied, resulting in fundamental violations of human rights and of equality expectations as Canadian citizens. For the context of the novel one might now argue that by the 1980s, legal equality had been fully achieved; in terms of ‘citizenship proper’, there were or seemed to be no open issues. However, as the struggle for redress illustrates, ‘citizenship’ indeed entails more than formal equality; this ‘surplus’ is best to be captured by the discussion about different levels of recognition necessary to fulfill the individual’s and a group’s expectations for justice towards a larger collective, in this case the Canadian nation. The recognition demanded in this specific work of fiction, the recognition necessary for an understanding of one’s role as full citizen, is that of Honneth’s third level, social esteem; the importance of this becomes particularly obvious towards the end of the novel:

Eleven a.m. The prime minister stands. The magic of speech begins – this ritual thing that humans do, the washing away of stains through the speaking of words. [...] In the future I know we will look back at this moment, as we stand and applaud in spite of being warned not to. We’ll remember how Ed Broadbent crossed the floor to shake the prime minister’s hand, and we’ll see all this as a distant star, an asterisk in space to guide us through nights that yet must come. The children, the grandchildren, will know that wrongs were done to their ancestors. And that these things were put right. (Kogawa 2005, 267)

The moment of public recognition beyond the question of legal rights reads almost as staged to create an impression of immediacy and urgency for the reader. The effect of the documentary style is heightened by giving the exact time of the event, the present tense of the novel is interrupted not by memory (as in so many passages throughout the book) but gives way to the future tense, more precisely: to the imagining of the act of remembering in the future. The “washing away of stains” refers to Japanese Canadians, who are finally in the eyes of the public cleared of the charge of having been enemies qua race; but also of the Canadian nation, whose stain is the violation of its own principles and the denial of this injustice over decades. Thus, the crucial point is the exact form in which the different groups in the novel envision this act of recognition that publically acknowledges them not only as citizens, but as a relevant group whose past is unconditionally part of the national past – and whose present significantly contributes to the national present as well as to its future.

One might argue that both of these spheres – that of the law and of social esteem – can easily be identified in the demands of the *historical* redress movement; this is not an aspect which only literature is privileged to highlight, on the contrary. How-

ever, one of the specific contributions and possibilities of literature to this debate lies in linking these spheres with the first sphere identified by Honneth, the sphere of love and care, or, to put it more generally, interpersonal recognition in close relationships. By intimately interweaving all three levels of recognition, this narrative link adds an additional level of complexity to the negotiation of citizenship in the novel, since the question of interpersonal recognition ties in directly with the struggle for redress as a form of symbolic and material recognition of rights and belonging. The novel explores how historical non-recognition, to use Taylor's term, has an impact not only upon the status of communities within larger society, but how it affects individuals in direct relation to their community membership and their membership in larger collectives. The experience of violence as a group, in this case Japanese Canadians – a violence that has left its traces in collective memory – helps produce violent individuals and dysfunctional communities and families; in *Emily Kato*, this experience of non-recognition results in severe breaches between the generations, in domestic violence, and even in individual bodies turning against themselves in sicknesses that seem to have no physiological origins.⁸ These can all be read as instances that in themselves constitute acts or, in the case of sickness, internalizations of non-recognition with serious individual and collective consequences. Individual subject-formation is directly connected to how "social membership, political participation, and societal arrangements" (Quaestio 2000, 22) are imagined in the novel; these images are tied, but not restricted to the cultural identity categories referred to above.

The novel thus provides a harsh critique of social exclusion and discrimination of citizens who do not conform to the implicit norm of Canadianness. At the same time, it is also affirmative of a notion of 'Canada' that has been charged by its critics with a "fetishization of its multicultural make-up" (Kambourelis 2007, 8) – in fact, one of the characters literally embodies this make-up: "Armenian, Haida, Japanese. That's my blood lineage. English and Jewish by adoption" (Kogawa 2005, 127-128). In *Emily Kato*, Japanese Canadians and Japanese Canadian history are affirmed as *Canadian*, are sought to be reinserted into the national imaginary.⁹ This insertion is accomplished by the act of recognition in parliament, with a direct effect on the individual characters and their self-positioning as Canadian citizens:

"I feel that I've just had a tumor removed," Dan says, "I finally feel that I'm a Canadian." We've all said it over the years. "No, no, I'm Canadian. I'm a Canadian." Sometimes it's been a defiant statement, a proclamation of a right. And today, finally, though we can hardly believe it, to be Canadian means what it hasn't meant before. Reconciliation. Belongingness. Home. (Kogawa 2005, 269)

8 For a more detailed analysis of this aspect see Sarkowsky 2008.

9 For a discussion of this strategy in the historical redress movement see McAllister 1999.

The shift here is obvious: from Canadian citizenship as *nationality* and legal right to Canadian citizenship as a *feeling* that is tied to belonging, or rather, the wish to belong in a particular place and national context. The sense of home and place achieved here in 'three steps' (reconciliation, belongingness, home) crucially depends on the act of public recognition, that is, the acknowledgement of previous acts of injustice and disavowal. This recognition is, as Dan's comparison suggests, the 'removal of a tumor' (from the individual body as well as the body of the nation) and thus an act of healing.

The understanding of recognition as put forward in Kogawa's novel is in many respects close to Taylor's model and underlying assumptions; this, however, does not imply that those Canadian texts that address issues of citizenship and recognition necessarily subscribe implicitly or explicitly to institutionalized multiculturalism or the primacy of the nation. Both concepts, citizenship and recognition, prove to be highly flexible and potentially unsettling of state-sponsored multiculturalism, as my second example, Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* (1996) will illustrate.

Literary Interventions II: 'Dangerous Indeterminacies' in *Diamond Grill*

Fred Wah has been known primarily as a poet and co-founder and editor of the Vancouver poetry magazine *Tish* in the 1960s. *Diamond Grill* is regarded as Wah's "first full-length published prose work" (Wah 2000, 97), but given its structure, mix of materials, use of language and voices, and styles, it is impossible to clearly categorize in terms of genre. The text consists of over one hundred sections of less than half a page to three pages at most; each of them provides a snapshot, a memory, a meditation, or a reflection of the narrator's life primarily in the 1950s and that of his parents (particularly his father) and extended family. These fragments are held together by the narrative voice (even though at times it assumes another's voice, for instance that of his father) and by place: the pieces circle mostly around Nelson in the interior of British Columbia, and more specifically around Wah Sr.'s *Diamond Grill Cafe*.

While the text certainly is in some sense auto/biographical, Wah himself prefers to call the book a "biotext" (Wah 1996, n.p.) and claims this term "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" (Wah 2000, 97). The 'generic expectations' Wah seeks to circumvent are not restricted to the question of textual genre but also refer to assumptions about, and the role of social structures and relations for subject constitution. For the subject constituted by Wah's biotext appears fragmented, the process of self-representation in *Diamond Grill*, as Joanne Saul points out, "is complicated by the fact that the subject will not stay still" (Saul 2006, 103). In the very first section, Wah indicates the slipperiness and hesitations, but also the openness and possibilities of the undertaking when he writes, "the journal journey tilts tight-fisted through the gutter of the book, avoiding a place to start – or end. Maps don't have begin-

nings, just edges. Some frayed and hazy margin of possibility, absence, gap" (Wah 1996, 1). The 'gutter', the 'edge', the 'margin' are the declared sites of this journey that rejects the notion of a stable, definable self and highlights the role of 'others' in the (ongoing) constitution of the subject. Therefore, the text investigates the various displacements that have shaped the family and its individual members – Wah's father, of Chinese-Scot-Irish descent, had been raised in China and returned to his family in Canada as a young adult without any knowledge of English; his mother was born in Sweden and grew up in Saskatchewan. Despite the sections' references to Wah's childhood and his maternal and paternal families, the text sets out not to accurately document family history, but rather through its bits and pieces – memories, assumed voices, extensive citations from other works and documents, theoretical segments, pure inventions – to probe into the process of a hybrid subject's constitution *between* accepted categories. By critically engaging with Mary Louise Pratt's concept of 'transculturation' as well as her notions of the 'contact zone' and 'autoethnography' (e.g. Wah 1996, 68-70n), Wah seeks to actualize, as Joanne Saul has it, the 'space between': "For Wah this space includes the space between Chinese and Canadian, between reading and writing, between poetry and narrative, between father and son, between past and present, between public and private" (Saul 2008, 133). These categories are clearly social, cultural, political; the link between language and these categories as well as their power of ascription and an almost Althusserian 'interpellation' (Wah 2000, 100) are obvious throughout the text:

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 1996, 98)

Wah includes numerous references to Canadian immigration and exclusion policies against Asians as well as extensive quotes from, for example, historical books about the region that affirm these categories of difference as real and fixed; Mary McNutter's calling the young Wah a 'chink' is not simply a child calling another names but ties in with established categories of perception and social stratification.

In contrast to these rigid categories, the kind of difference *Diamond Grill* investigates is not fixed; Wah directly connects the process of writing to the process of becoming and ongoing subject constitution: the 'space between' is opened by what Wah has called in a different context "writing-on-the-move" (Wah 2000, 129), a motion that avoids fixity and stasis. The non-linearity and achronological arrangement of the narrative fragments create a direct link to Wah's poetry and destabilize the sense of 'self' suggested by the concepts of 'autobiography' and 'life writing' rejected by Wah. Instead, "the sanctity of the self or the 'auto' is interrogated, not only by his

insistence on dialogue and collaboration [...] but also in his exploration of subjectivity as a complex construction" (Saul 2008, 141).

Herein lies one of the text's challenges, in particular with regard to its critical engagement with 'Canada'. Wah

rejects what he sees as 'a nationalist aesthetic that continually attempts to expropriate difference into its own consuming narrative' (Wah 2000, 60) and engages instead in debates around the constructedness of the Canadian nation and the role of the nation state in the subject's identification. (Saul 2006, 126)

These identifications are the result of specific spatial, historical, and familial constellations; 'the nation' and state policies are examined and critically questioned as prime examples for such powerful constellations. Thus, like Kogawa, Wah directly criticizes Canadian exclusionary policies in history and their effect upon individuals and communities:

But no wonder my grandfather, my father, and their kin continue to look back at China. Canada couldn't be an investment for them. The 1923 Chinese Act of Exclusion isn't repealed until 1947. Even though my dad was born in Medicine Hat, he wasn't allowed to vote until 1948. Nor are any of the other *orientals* in Canada. (Wah 1996, 110)

While this criticism may seem compatible with the claim for equal access and inclusion into the national collective as put forward by Kogawa's novel, Wah's project goes beyond the deconstruction of national history 'from below'; *Diamond Grill* investigates the various possibilities of shifting cultural locations and of hybridity as impossible to be contained by the nation or national narratives: "Sorry, I'm just not interested in this collective enterprise erected from the sacrosanct great railway imagination dedicated to harvesting a dominant white cultural landscape" (Wah 1996, 125). The subject constructed in *Diamond Grill* is thus not "the idealized multicultural subject who can be known as a modified citizen" (Miki 2001, 68); Canadian 'multiculturalism' provides no helpful angle here either, since it depends on fixed definitions of cultural origin and difference. As Homi Bhabha has argued,

multiculturalists who strive to constitute nondiscriminatory minority identities cannot simply do so by affirming the place they occupy, or by returning to an 'unmarked' authentic origin or pre-text: their recognition requires the negotiation of a dangerous indeterminacy. (Bhabha 1998, 31)

Indeterminacy, openness, a refusal of closure in Wah's text – as he says in an interview with Ashok Mathur, "Diamond Grill settles nothing (I hope)" (Wah 2000, 97) – posits the central challenge to the notion of cultural difference that underlies institutional multiculturalism, multicultural citizenship, and to an understanding of recognition as put forward by Charles Taylor. While Kogawa's novel presents an attempt to reinscribe Japanese Canadians into the nation, *Diamond Grill* calls this nation's post-1960s self-definition through diversity and institutionalized multiculturalism into question. Wah might even agree with Fraser's critique of Taylor's understanding of recognition and the link she sees to identity politics:

The identity politics model of recognition tends also to reify identity. Stressing the need to elaborate and display an authentic, self-affirming, and self-generated collective identity, it puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to a given group culture. Cultural dissidence and experimentation are accordingly discouraged, when they are not simply equated with disloyalty. (Fraser 2008, 133)

Or, one might add, even charged with 'inauthenticity'. *Diamond Grill* depicts a Chinese Canadian community, in fact, families, that are anything but homogenous and defy any attempt to fix cultural identities or categories; he writes about his father,

while he and [his sister] had been in China, their brothers and sisters had negotiated particular identities for themselves through the familiarity of a white European small prairie town commonality (albeit colonial democracy). Though he arrives back to everyone struggling through the thirties, they all have their place. [...] Hybridize or disappear; family *in* place. (Wah 1996, 20)

Notions of diaspora, place, and hybridization are central to the ways in which different subjectivities are narrated in the text. Hybridity is social, cultural, linguistic; the different genres this biotext draws on, the mix of language levels, styles, and materials, illustrate this hybridity on the textual level. Roy Miki points to Wah's "performance of the position inbetween – for him the position of the hyphen – that the powers of social normalization cover over" (Miki 2001, 72). These powers of social normalization include institutionalized multicultural policies and the concept of recognition that underlies them.

However, this does not mean that recognition and citizenship are not an issue in *Diamond Grill*. Rather, the recognition Wah and other critics of institutionalized multiculturalism claim is a recognition of the "dangerous indeterminacy" as Bhabha has it. These indeterminacies of identity are worked into the form of the text – its deep distrust in the fixity of genre, authority of voice, even language itself. As Wah insists, the hybrid writer must develop "instruments of disturbance, dislocation, and

displacement" (Wah 2000, 73) and maintain "the ability to remain within an ambivalence without succumbing to the pull of any single culture (resolution, cadence, closure)" (Wah 2000, 83), and this is certainly what he successfully sets out to do in *Diamond Grill*. He thereby upsets any attempt to "reify" identity, alterity, and difference, any attempt to treat "difference (a relation) as an intrinsic property of 'cultures' and as a *value* (a socially 'enriching' one), to be 'represented' as such" (Bennett 1998, 4). It is to a large extent this understanding of cultural difference as property which, according to its critics such as Bennett, Bhabha, or Fraser, underlies both institution-alized multiculturalism and Taylor's account of recognition closely related to it.

'Difference' in *Diamond Grill* is therefore a shifting relation, not a cultural property; recognition of difference requires a constant renegotiation of both collective and individual identities as historically, culturally, socially, and politically constructed and hence unstable and provisional – as situated, but not fixed, to take up Joanne Saul's juxtaposition (Saul 2006, 108). This is not a rejection of notions of recognition *per se*, but requires a different model of recognition than put forward by Taylor and implemented in multicultural policies, a model that rejects predetermined categories of identity and difference and insists on the centrality of the local and specific: "That's it, the local. What is meant in the west by the term regional. The immediate 'here', the palpable, tangible 'here', imprinted with whatever trailing cellular memory, histology, history, story" (Wah 2000, 48).¹⁰ This creates a continuous oscillation between the universal and the specific – as Honneth argues,

all struggles for recognition [...] progress through a playing out of the moral dialectic of the universal and the particular: one can always appeal for a particular relative difference by applying a general principle of mutual recognition, which normatively compels an expansion of the existing relations of recognition. (Honneth 2003, 152)

This 'expansion' Honneth envisions may well mean a fundamental re-ordering of these relations without taking leave of the general principle. His tripartite division into spheres is here, as in Kogawa's example, helpful to highlight the ways in which forms of recognition intertwine; even more forcefully than *Emily Kato*, *Diamond Grill* illustrates or rather performs the close connection of 'private' and 'public' spheres of recognition in the constitution of the subject. This, in turn, is crucial for the understanding of citizenship as "the ways and means by which a society imagines and organizes social membership, political participation, and societal arrangements" – imagination and organisation of membership and participation depend on relations of mutual recognition, and vice versa. Here, literary texts and their negotiation of social and theoretical issues can indeed be seen as part of societal exchanges; cen-

10 For a discussion of the link of Wah's politics of the local and his poetics see Saul 2008, in particular 145-146.

tral for their contribution and intervention is their conceptual openness and their potential to question and unsettle cultural categories. This openness admittedly poses a challenge to the drafting of specific policies, multicultural or otherwise; however, the particular contribution of literary texts is literally radical in the sense that it allows to rethink the 'roots' of policies and categories of difference. As such, they do function as part of the "complex processes of public argument, deliberation, and exchange," to quote Benhabib once again, that "not only change established understandings but also transform what passes as the valid or established view of an authoritative precedent" (Benhabib 2004, 179-180). The different forms these contributions take in and through literature can be understood as a kind of participation that provides the basis for multi/cultural citizenship in a non-essentialist sense.

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