The word “home” is being used in many different ways. As “home country” it refers to a whole society and political system. In the phrase “my home is my castle” it suggests a fortified private sphere separated from outside societal or political intervention. The German “Heimat” refers to a sentimental attachment to a landscape (but not a cityscape) and a vague “Germanness” connected with a polity. Implied in “American” or “Un-American” it refers to a – not clearly defined – set of values and national pride in the U.S. Implied in debates about a “Canadian identity,” it seems elusive – though observers from the outside, whether scholars or tourists, seem to be able to distinguish Canadian traits and social structures from U.S., British, or French ones.

A change in perspective from such vague concepts to the socialization of people into a society provides a different reading of what “home” means. Infants and children are socialized into spaces of family, living quarters, immediate neighbourhood, school – the micro-space. Adult return migrants, after long periods of absence, experience the “home town” as small – this may be explained by larger spaces in their society of choice, but it is also explained by body size: Children need two steps where adults need one, children often have to look up while adults look level or down. Adolescents move into a meso-level space, regional labour markets and relations gendered according to specific norms. On the macro-level, the 19th-century state provided a legal and the 20th-century state also an institutional framework. Statewide elites impose a blueprint of cultural unity – or even uniformity – on societies, then called “nation”. However, no European state has been as homogeneous as historians of the nation-state paradigm or of nationalist ideology ever imagined (The Historical; The Social). Thus: Home is not a state or a nation, but a lived experience in an accessible social space.

Cultural transfer between homes of origin and homes selected through migration to improve options is usually understood as occurring between immigrants and host societies and between interacting ethno-cultural groups.
This assumes an unmediated, “straight” handing down – note the hierarchy – or a passing on as well as demarcated, internally homogeneous cultural (-genic) groups rather than an encoding of cultural preferences, a transmission of these messages, and a process of receiving and decoding by young people in their own terms of reference. Youths face complex, encoded, multiple-meaning messages and engage in an active process of self-creation by selection between different products in the market-supply of cultural models.

As to the homogeneity of societies, whether hegemonic (“national”) or subaltern (“minority”, “immigrant”, “ethnic”), women and gender studies have pointed out the differences between women’s and men’s cultures, labour and working-class historians to specific class cultures, queer studies to constructions of sexuality. Nation-state and ethnic-group approaches in scholarship have been vastly refined through the emergence of the triad class-gender-ethnicity/race and its complex cultural, societal, and economic implications. These categories have been related to power strategies of hierarchization, of inclusion or exclusion of groups and individuals. In the social sciences and humanities, intergenerational cultural differences have not been considered of paramount importance. Exceptions are educational research, often considered a kind of applied, lesser version of scholarship, and in marketing research, often motivated by utilitarian goals and business interests. While the former looks at whole human beings, the latter reduces young people to consumers with profit-generating purchasing power. The culture of whole societies, of the global, cosmopolitan, or internationalist world, and, in particular, of each next generation of individuals, is and has been shaped by the interaction of young people with these worlds around them.

The Social Worlds of Migrating Women, Men, and Children in the Past

The memories of immigrants to Canada from three different periods and origins will indicate the experience of home: Wilson and Jemima Benson arriving from Ireland in the 1840s, Maki Fukushima and her family since the 1910s, the Salloum family from Syria in the 1930s (Hoerder 1999). I will argue that complex memories of the culture of origin often refer to family, locality, and social relations – i.e. to home community, rather than to state territory or nation or whole society, i.e. to home state. Transfer of rigid norms from an unbeloved home state to a post-migration society would prevent individual agency to negotiate new circumstances. In migrants’ mind-sets, the absence or non-acceptance of the ideology-imposed frame of norms mandated in the society of origin permitted and permits flexible responses to the post-migration regional Canadian contexts.
Wilson Benson, born in 1821 in Belfast, according to his autobiography arrived in Montreal with his wife Jemima in 1841. Their new home was not “Canada” – our very language overlooks that at the time there were two Canadas, East and West or an Upper and a Lower British colony. While the two newcomers knew little about the political organization of the new society, they did know that in the regions of Ireland they knew life had been difficult, even intolerable. They migrated across the Atlantic in family networks: their destination, rather than Canadian society as a whole, was a single home, that of Jemima’s brother. In the next decades, they moved from town to town, labouring, keeping store, trying to eke out a living. The connection between their temporary stopovers was the presence of compatriots: They moved through an Irish social space. In this space men and women of other cultural backgrounds also lived, but people recognized those of similar regional-cultural origin by dialect and customs. The Irish, of course, were internally diverse, too. But most outside, i.e. other-cultured, observers did not – could not – differentiate between regional socializations because they neither knew the geography of Ireland nor the regional customs nor the many dialects. They needed the cognitive simplification “the Irish” – though usually with the differentiation into Catholic and Protestant ones, since for long European peoples had defined themselves by religion rather than by ethnicity. Wilson Benson recognized the consequences of the simplification: He was unhappy about one single brawling group of men because he knew that this would reinforce prejudices against the Irish. Scholars, too, have been discussing cultural groups in terms of Irish, English, Scots, Welsh – which, at least, is considerably more differentiated than the category “British-origin” of the census, the main data-base for researchers. Wilson and Jemima never returned to their childhood spaces, family relations had never been close and, when relatives died, the tenuous emotional ties dissolved. They made the Irish social space along the shores of the St. Lawrence and north of Toronto their home, they “Canadianized” in a particular setting (Benson).

In another segment of Canada, British Columbia, migrants arrived from southern Chinese provinces (not: from “China” or “the Celestial Empire”), from Punjabi villages, and from particular districts in Japan. Like daughters of the British gentry, Maki Fukushima came from a family of declining fortunes. She shared the dream of going “to America” and earning money. Her future husband had emigrated from a neighbouring village a decade and a half earlier: “I didn’t know what kind of man he was, but I was happy as long as I could get to America”. Landing at Victoria in 1914, she was shocked to learn that “Canada” was not “America”. After buying her “an outfit of
Western clothes,” her husband only a day later took her to his tie making camp near New Westminster – his, and from now on, her home: filthy, cracks in the bunkhouse’s ceiling, worse than anything “at home” in Oshima, Kyushu island, Japan. There was no time for complaints, the place meant labour. She had to cook for his crew. Home became a transpacific connection: an intense desire to return to Oshima; complete resignation in a sequence of camps near Port Alberni, Vancouver Island; tears whenever a letter from the family in Japan came. In between, she began to raise two children and gave birth to a third, but during a visit to Japan had to leave all three with her mother. She had to have her hands free to work in the camps. Later, her husband worked as a gardener, she as a housemaid. Their employer family was friendly inside the house, but maintained a distance outside, in public view. In 1927, Maki brought her children back to Canada. “I settled down and never thought of going back again”. Acculturation had crept on her imperceptibly (Fukushima).

The Salloum family arrived in 1928 in again a different Canada, southern Saskatchewan, from another social space on the globe, Qar’awn in the Al-Biqa’ Valley of Syria, then under French colonial domination. The family had lived in a society of Sunni Muslims interspersed with Druses, Orthodox and Maronite Christians, and some Jews, as well as with men and women from the Armenian and Kurdish refugee diasporas. In their new home, the Salloums harvested one good crop, then drought set in: “mother nature refused to send the life-giving rains”. In the following dustbowl and depression years, prairie neighbours originating from many countries and cultures abandoned their land, self-sufficient farmers became itinerants in search of food. Ms Salloum, like Irish, English, and Ukrainian women, had brought seeds from their old home, strains adapted to arid climates. Thus the family could feed itself. As for many migrants, an economy of survival, of garnering the basic subsistence, was the first experience. Their life improved when other Syrians – from neighbouring villages in Syria, in fact – passed by as itinerant traders and helped the family to establish new networks. They, too, began to consider themselves Canadian (Salloum).

All of these men, women, and children did not hark back to a “home country” but remembered particular networks of kin and friends, local landscapes, regional ways of making a living. They transposed their skills to a specific region in Canada and, under difficult or even adverse circumstances, created a new social space for themselves, commensurate with their skills, their means, their aspirations.
The Worlds of British-Origin and French-Speaking Men and Women in Canada

The immigrants’ and migrants’ memory of personal spaces needs to be compared and contrasted with the hegemonic memory-tied ideology of imperial belonging of British gate-keepers and with the terroir-mentality of French-speakers. I will argue that the “national” perspectives, tied to imperial or catholic worldviews, prevented differentiation according to interest and locality and thus resulted, among the two elites, in a lack of identification with the new society.

Earlier than in the United States, scholars in Canada realized that no national model of acculturation existed. In bi-cultural Montreal, immigrants could chose between two major cultures, each differentiated by gender and class, by stage in the life-cycle and religious belonging (Hughes 1948; Hughes et al.; Juteau; Isajiw). In addition, rather than to opt for a particular variant of the two hegemonic cultures, migrants might prefer to live in a “half-way” immigrant community or join another ethnic group. The well-organized Ukrainian group, in Toronto and in the Prairies, was attractive to Poles and other neighbours in the “old home,” wherever they were too few to build their own communities and demand recognition. In Montreal, Germans from Germany and Germans from Russia or other eastern territories formed an uneasy alliance (Hoerder 1999, 71-84, 151-175). The one-sided paradigm of immigration and ethnic history, from nation-state to ethnic enclave in another nation-state, never had much support from empirical data. Rather, it emerged from the socialization of scholars into nation-state societies, histories, and ideologies.

British-Canadians and French-Canadians were internally differentiated. The former consisted of the English, who in the past had colonized and annexed the Welsh, the Irish, and the Scots. All three non-English cultural groups from the so-called British isles retained a memory of their own Celtic languages and regional cultures. The English themselves were divided by county, town, or city of origin, by social status, and by means they had upon arrival in the Canada they considered a colony or, later, a “white” dominion. Around 1900, an influential group of intellectual gatekeepers placed imperial Britishness far above any English-Canadianness, not to speak of a French-Canadianness or some kind of ethnicity of immigrants. Among the differentiations they overlooked, was the fact that many English-speakers were recent immigrants, too. Russian Jews in Montreal, German Protestants in Toronto, Black or White U.S. immigrants, or Ukrainians in the Prairies as
well as newcomers from the several Asian cultures in the West had no interest or intention to deal with the British Empire. A wide chasm separated the worlds of the ideologues from those of people fashioning their lives on farms or as workers, even though they lived in the same geographic region called Canada.

Similarly, French-Canadians formed a highly differentiated society which also stood in contrast to the pronouncements of their religious-ideological élites définitrices. Around 1900, people worked in urban commerce, in the river towns’ small industry, on farms, or in lumbering and mining in the north. Some settled the Gaspé and other marginal lands, others departed from the constraining society and took jobs in New England’s textile industries. Religious women carved out independent lives; male clerics in some orders devoted themselves to social reform. French-speakers of different cultures lived in the Maritime provinces and on the Ontario side of the Ottawa river; new immigrants from France and the French-language parts of Belgium and Switzerland came to farm in the Prairies. In addition, French-speaking Métis form a discriminated segment of Canada’s many societies. Again, no single model to which to aspire or acculturate could be detected by immigrants. The closed society of Catholic Quebec reflected the closed minds of clerical and other intellectual gatekeepers. The construct contained as little reflection of society as the diametrically opposed construct of the British-Canadian imperialists. Thus, newcomers had to create their own societies (Hoerder 2004a).

To pass on their partial and partisan views of society, the ideologues kept control over the school systems. In French Canada, the result was unmitigated disaster. The Roman Catholic Church’s hostility to education and its management of the schools meant that funds spent on Catholic pupils amounted to about half as much as those spent on Protestant ones (under their own Commission); in consequence, at about 1900, Quebec’s francophone population of 1.3 million sent 722 students to university, the anglophone one of 0.2 million sent 1358. Women hired as teachers were paid two or three times less than men. The meagre pay did not warrant the effort and many children waited for teachers who never came. Limited education led to low incomes – on average, French-Canadians earned less than recent immigrants. While Quebeckers were not un peuple sans histoire et sans littérature, as Lord Durham had commented in his Report of 1839, their clergy made them into a people with but little literacy and education (Rioux 1969, 61; Trofimenkoff). Is home where no education may be received?
In contrast, English-Canada’s non-denominational school-system has been held out as a model. However, the problem was not creed but empire. British-imperial hegemony over subject matter in schools baffled schoolchildren in all colonies and Dominions. They learnt everything they would never need to know about the British isles, institutions, and imperial manliness, but little or nothing about the societies in which they lived. London-based ideologues and local true believers imposed curricula on Canadians, Jamaicans, Indians, Australians, and on others (Conway, 96-104; Pilkington 11; Hahamovitch). For teachers in Ontario, British and Canadian were decreed to be synonymous. British-origin gatekeepers remained suspended between British ideology and Canadian polity. Charging immigrants with being culturally in limbo was but a trope to hide their own unwillingness to identify with Canada (Baldus et al.). Once “ethnic” children had completed this indoctrination, national and local elites of British background still did not admit them into their circles and social strata. In a poem, a Ukrainian-Canadian complained in 1914: “We help Canada rise / In Commerce and all things […] / We will tell the whole world: / «English culture is peculiar»” (Czumer, 104-12, 118-119). Is home where, instead of the “home society,” only a British-imperial world is part of the curriculum? The social spaces, which the self-styled “founding nations” demarcated, could not serve as “home” to immigrant children.

Mentally, powerful segments of the elites had not made Canada their home. They either lived in an imagined imperial world or in imagined Catholic localities of curé et terroir. In result, Canada as a polity remained colonial and, in the 1960s, needed a generation of young people and new politicians to decolonize. However, the hypothesis seems plausible, that the absence of nationalist rhetoric in historic and present discourse of Canadians may be explained by the absence of elite identification with its own state at a time, when in European societies nationalism raged, pitted peoples against each other, and ended in destruction and death. For fatherlands and mother countries, men did go to war and die; home is a place to live.

Immigrants from Halifax to Victoria, from Ontario’s farms to those of the Prairies, worshipped neither the Empire nor the Pope. They created local societies that grew into larger regions. They identified with the homes they created for themselves and the communities they established with their neighbours. Those who decided to apply for citizenship were hardly aware that, to 1947, they would become British rather than Canadian. Their own achievements and the future prospects of their children made Canada their home, a memorable social space. To the founding people, the foundations
Transcultural Homes of Young Immigrant Girls and Boys in the 1990s

Migrants like the Bensons, Salloums, or Fukushimas left social spaces that could serve as homes only if deprivations and discomforts were accepted. Such homes-of-birth were memorable because of social relationships and emotional ties; but they were hostile as regards life options. Lives in many of these places were corseted by rigid structures, hierarchies, values which provided no space to manoeuvre, no room to negotiate change. In Canada – and other open societies – migrants could become agents of their own lives and create spaces for themselves.

Newcomers of the 1990s and 2000s continue to do so; but the context has changed as regards migration systems and as regards the speed of long-distance communication, telephone and internet rather than surface mail. The Atlantic migration system has come to an end; a south-north system in the Americas brought refugees from Latin America; the transpacific system from Asian societies has intensified and changed in character. Migrants from South Asia may work in the oil-producing Persian Gulf states and then continue to Calgary, for example. Chinese families establish bases in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Lives thus become multi-focal and “homes” emerge at several locations in sequence. Depending on the specific migration trajectory, young people live various forms of transcultural connectedness.

Youths in Calgary, for example, may concurrently have their family of origin in Lucknow, India, a group of friends in Dubai where they lived with their parents for several years, and a peer group in school and neighbourhood in Calgary. They are in daily contact with friends at their previous home and, in larger intervals, but regularly, with grandparents or other kin in their birth home. They interact with similarly mobile friends in Calgary and are able to fashion lives in a world of media messages and market pressures that is not dominated by such outside forces. They incorporate sequential homes into their personal life trajectories and will add more when becoming independent of their parents. Some spaces will lose importance in memory over time, others – through easy travel – will be reinvigorated regularly through visits and face-to-face communication (Hébert 2004). Youths in Montreal of different cultural backgrounds carve other ways of identification and creating homes: Children of Chilean or Salvadorian refugees deal with a past and with regimes that had forced their parents to leave what had been homes –
their homes had been taken from them. Many had spent so many years in refugee camps that these had become home social spaces where children had been born and grown up. They developed a camp identity rather than one located in the region of the parents’ home. Young Chilean-origin Montrealers adhere to a mystique of a once revolutionary society, view themselves as “Latinos” in a community of solidarity and options but do not accept Quebec culture. In contrast, Salvadorian-origin youths from working-class families, who face prejudices and limited options, react by engaging with the new home society in a struggle for equality and the chance to develop. Among both groups, young women, in view of the machismo of some of their male peers, showed themselves more open to the Montreal version of Canadian culture. Identification and acculturation strategies are gendered (Laperrière).

The self-description of these youths includes an awareness and pride in the culture of origin but is deeply modern and post-national as regards belongings: they are Montrealers, Canadians, North-Americans or Latinos, Westerners, or – generically – human beings. Similar self-definitions were given by young people in Hamburg, London, and Paris. They retain a cultural commitment to the culture of their family home while living pluralist relationships and contexts in the new home space. The combination of both permits autonomy from parents and society as regards decisions taken as well as the development of strategies and of social capital to plan life-projects for their futures that remain flexible and trajectories, in which particular paths chosen do not cut off all other options (Hoerder 2004b). “When neighbourhoods are situated in world-wide contexts, they allow residents to live locally, regionally, (nationally), and globally” and to decide which social space to invest with memory of home (Hébert et al.). The many meanings of “home” and their vagueness, which permitted an instrumentalization by nation-state elites, has given way to self-determined practices of turning places into social spaces and of living sequences of memorable homes.

Works Cited


