

“Streets are the dwelling place of the collective”¹

Public Space and Cosmopolitan Citizenship in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*

In Dionne Brand’s novel *What We All Long For*, the identity of diasporic characters in the hostland (Canada) continually oscillates between belonging and non-belonging; this psychological oscillation is spatially enacted in Toronto. Here, members of diasporic communities (along with the city’s other inhabitants) must move between different social, ethnic, and gendered areas in the city. These material places are sites of complex social relationships which offer varying and unstable levels of permeability based on class, gender, ethnicity, and a host of other axes of identification.² Negotiation of this uneven terrain ensures that self-definition is never stable for the first-generation migrating diasporic characters (Cam, Tuan, and Jackie’s and Oku’s parents) who do not possess a firm foothold in the hostland because it is not the homeland—a place which is always elsewhere if it exists physically at all and with which these characters have a fraught relationship that effectively precludes return.³ The process of self-definition is even more precarious for the second-generation characters (Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku), however. The second generation occupies an uneasy position in relation to the hostland, their country of birth and primary place of residence, yet the bureaucratic officers of the state do not fully recognize their right to access all the practices of citizenship (Oku, for instance, is continually read as a criminal by the city’s police force). As well, they are unable to fully connect with the homeland and traditions of their parents. This paper considers some of the myriad ways that this process of self-definition is imagined and complicated in Dionne Brand’s *What We All*

Long For. I argue that the characters in Brand's novel negotiate their subjectivities in public places, creating what I call "territorialized cosmopolitan" subjectivities—subjectivities with multiple affiliations across axes of gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality which are not unrooted or free-floating but are principally and firmly located in the physicality of Toronto.⁴

In *What We All Long For*, Dionne Brand takes issue with a model of defining national identity that is unbalanced in favour of those possessing hegemonic Canadian subjectivities (i.e. white, anglo- or francophone, and male). First, Brand dramatizes moments of misrecognition where migrants to Toronto (whether from other countries or other regions of Canada) are recognized by the hegemonic inhabitants of Toronto in a way that does not truly acknowledge them as real people rather than stereotypes. For the first-generation characters of this novel, the dialogical process of identity is always weighted in favour of narrow, confining definitions of gender and, particularly, ethnicity—such as Cam's and Tuan's inability to find work outside of Vietnamese restaurants. Second, Brand depicts the possibility of refusing these misrecognitions and of actively engaging with recognition. The second-generation characters actively move into the city's public places to find and create new and different dialogues about what it means to be a citizen of the metropolis—for instance, Oku's quasi-friendships with the Rasta and the composer, two homeless men he encounters in Kensington Market and throughout the city, and Tuyen's, Oku's, and Carla's delight in the pandemonium surrounding Korea's World Cup win. They demand, through their reinvention of Toronto's public places, new terms for this dialogue that acknowledge their position as citizens of the city. Whereas the first-generation characters try to work within the discursive limits of multicultural citizenship which emphasize certain expressions of ethnicity such as food and are overly reliant on notions of "authenticity," the second-generation characters begin to sketch out the possibilities of a territorialized cosmopolitan that allows for a connection with the diasporic cultures of their parents and the multi-ethnic cultures of the globalized city, and that emphasizes mutability over authenticity.

For the first-generation, migrating characters, Toronto is a site of marginalization where the places open to them are predicated upon invisibility and separation. They occupy what Nancy Fraser calls "subaltern counterpublics." Fraser argues that, in response to their invisibility, "members of subordinated social groups . . . have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics" and that "these *subaltern counterpublics* . . . are parallel

discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 210; emphasis in original). For the first-generation characters, then, Toronto is an essentially unwelcoming place where their difference becomes insurmountable and isolating. In contrast, their children (all but one are born in Toronto) struggle to bridge the gap between the world of their parents—a world which seems obsolete and static to them—and that in which they were born and grew up. Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku resist their imposed invisibility in the city and stake out their own public spaces on their own terms. These second-generation characters forge new, territorialized cosmopolitan identities that encompass multiple positionalities but which remain rooted in the physical place of Toronto; these cosmopolitan identities can be seen in the celebration of Korea’s World Cup victory and in the graffiti crew’s mural seen in the final pages of the novel, among other moments.

Making Visible an Invisible Toronto

With the movement of these second-generation characters throughout the city, Brand decentres the dominant economic and cultural places of Toronto and brings the so-called margins into a central position. Saskia Sassen suggests that

The city concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes these cultures and identities with “otherness” thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (188)

Brand reveals this slippage by concentrating on those places in the city which are othered by dominant corporate culture, and by creating new nodes of power. Kensington Market, for instance, becomes a central hub in the Toronto of *What We All Long For*—this is where Oku spends his days away from his parents, close to where Jackie’s clothing store is, where Carla’s stepmother buys her groceries. While it ostensibly mirrors the consumer thrust of places like Bloor Street, Kensington Market is a place that offers different ways of consuming with its independently owned stores and its emphatic publicness where storefronts open up and spill out onto the street instead of the privatized opening inwards of most shopping areas where goods are kept orderly and behind glass. For the Situationists and other political revolutionaries who advocate against consumerism, “the best urban

activity [is] human, unmechanized, and non-alienating, and their texts, films, and maps indicated some possibilities, variously idealizing the marketplaces . . . the traditional cafés . . . and the places of student congregation” (Sadler 92)—something that is reflected in the centrality of a public marketplace which is filled with cafés and second-hand clothing stores in the novel. Brand’s refocalizing of Toronto with an emphasis on a public marketplace has a similarly political purpose. While this novel hardly foments revolution, it does begin to outline a vision of Toronto that is not exclusively centred on corporate power.

In contrast to this new prominence of Kensington Market, the traditional (white) power centres of Toronto—Bay Street, Queen’s Park, and City Hall—disappear except through their law enforcement arm—the Toronto Police and Mimico Correctional Institute.⁵ Brand re-presents Toronto as a place where “lives . . . are doubled, tripled, conjugated” (5) yet remain invisible except to the repressive apparatuses of the state: the police and the prison system make the city’s non-white inhabitants all too painfully visible.⁶ Oku and Jamal, as well as the other young black men in the text, can never be truly invisible to the police as they are misrecognized as always already criminal, regardless of their actions; their criminality is inscribed onto their very bodies.⁷ In *The Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand posits that the “courtroom is a rite of passage for . . . diasporic children” (107). This statement proves true for many of the men in *What We All Long For* and is a statement that Oku echoes: jail is a “[r]ite of passage in this culture, girl. Rite of passage for a young black man” (46).

However, while law enforcement appears repeatedly, the sites of corporate power are strikingly absent. While Saskia Sassen argues that the buildings of Bay Street and of all financial districts in global cities have large invisible workforces of visible minorities (193), this workplace invisibility is inverted in *What We All Long For*. Of the four main characters, only Carla works in any proximity to the centres of corporate power.⁸ However, her job as courier is one in which she does not truly belong to this economic world. She shuttles between workplaces without actually belonging to one (besides the courier company that she works for). Carla is part of this invisible workplace of secretaries and cleaning staff that the business world is dependent upon but who are dismissed as unimportant. Carla is thus the only visible member of the corporate world, yet she occupies a liminal space as she is both within and without the corporate world—she delivers packages to corporate offices but is not part of one herself. The economic centre of Toronto is, thus, doubly

effaced: its invisible workforce (in the form of Carla) is made visible in place of bankers and lawyers, and the buildings themselves are never mentioned and, thus, disappear in the shift to different public places such as Kensington Market and Little Korea where Binh's store is located. To be situated in only one world, either as unassimilated first generationer or corporate executive is to be rendered, ironically, most optically regulated or even unavailable in this vision of urban space.

The only other member of the corporate world present in the text is Binh, Tuyen's brother, who has an MBA and runs a small electronics store. However, as a small business owner, he is not fully immersed in corporate capitalism. For while he participates in the corporate economy—he trades and invests capital—this participation is primarily related to goods that bourgeois capitalism wishes to ignore, such as stolen and counterfeit electronics and illegal workers. Binh's primary role in the city's economic system, then, runs parallel to the world of Bay Street but remains widely undetected or disavowed; he is an active member of the city's shadow economy.

Subaltern Counterpublics and Spaces of Prescribed Ethnicity

Into this context of the deterritorialized traditional centres of white Toronto and the revelation of a veiled parallel economy of bike couriers and the non-authorized exchange of goods, Brand depicts the generational striations among this newly central group of diasporic individuals. The stories of the first-generation characters in *What We All Long For* show the multiple ways in which bureaucratic authorities and stereotypical assumptions about immigrants' skills make them invisible or reduce them to broad categories. These characters are limited to set discursive spaces that make confining assumptions about what it means to be an immigrant or to belong to a specific ethnic group, which shape how these first-generation characters access physical places. In her theorization of subaltern counterpublics, Nancy Fraser suggests that these are not utopic spaces but ones which remain internally stratified—reflecting the stratification of the society in which they are formed. Nonetheless, she suggests that “they help expand discursive space. In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out. In general, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation” (210).

The clearest subaltern counterpublic in *What We All Long For* is the Paramount. This club, which was known only by a “select group. Black people and a few, very few, hip whites—whites who were connected” (95),

becomes a counterpublic space where members of the Black diaspora in Toronto can go “to feel in their own skin, in their own life” (95), to regroup after the degradation of the city. This counterpublic space is one in which to re-imagine the city and invert its social stratifications because in it blackness becomes central rather than marginalized. The Paramount also reveals the heterogeneity of blackness—something which is elided by the city. Thus, the Scotian and the West Indian communities demand the recognition of their differences in the Paramount. These differences lead to occasional violence; however, the Paramount and the other counterpublic spaces/clubs are sites where heterogeneity—expressed through style and sexuality for the most part—creates alliances between the different groups (96, 179). These are places where difference (from both one another and, perhaps more importantly, the white bourgeois inhabitants of the city) is validated: “What’s life . . . if you couldn’t see yourself strutting into the Paramount to the appreciation, the love of other dreamers like yourself? If no one else could verify your state of cool existence” (179)? Jackie’s parents feel at home in the Paramount: something that they do not feel in the rest of the city. These clubs resist the dominant Canadian gaze—something a Ghanaian man draws Jackie’s mother’s attention to when he asks her to “come and go with me back to my country. . . . You are lost here. No one loves you here. In my country you will be a queen” (179). Indeed, the closing of the Paramount and all the other clubs Jackie’s parents frequented, with the key exception of the seedy and degrading Duke, is experienced as a deep loss which is in excess of the loss of a nightclub: “When the Paramount closed, Jackie’s mother and father were lost. Everyone in Alexandra Park was lost. Even some up on Bathurst Street and Vaughan Road and Eglinton Avenue. As far out as Dawes Road and Pape Avenue. All the glamour left their lives” (178). For Jackie’s parents, “the thought of hard times without even the relief of the Paramount was unbearable” (179). This loss is a form of dislocation which further compounds Jackie’s parents’ sense of dislocation within Toronto.

Tuyen’s parents and Carla’s mother also feel a similar invisibility in Toronto; Tuan and Cam cannot practise their professions (engineering and medicine, respectively) and Angie is cut off from her family and friends because of her interracial affair with Derek. Yet neither Tuan and Cam nor Angie are able to access the kind of counterpublic sphere that Jackie’s parents are—suggesting that the ability to form or join subaltern counterpublics marks a privilege within marginalization.⁹ Instead, Tuan, Cam, and Angie occupy spaces that are defined by prescribed visions of ethnicity and gender.

Tuan and Cam resign themselves to the fact that the city has a particular view of them that they will be unable to transcend and so they become who they are imagined to be:

They had come thinking that they would be who they were, or at least who they had managed to remain. After the loss of Quy, it made a resigned sense to them that they would lose other parts of themselves. Once they accepted that, it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food. (66-67)

While Tuan and Cam become very successful financially, this is at the expense of their own particular desires and talents—significantly, neither Tuan nor Cam are able to actually cook the food that they are defined by.¹⁰

Like Tuan's and Cam's restaurant, which is a place defined by expectations about ethnicity, Angie's apartment is defined by gendered expectations. Her apartment is described by Carla as a site of either complete maternal love—it is "exhilarating[ly] domestic" (239)—or of illicit sexuality—it is here where Derek visits to make love to Angie (240; 245). Just as her roles of mother and mistress enacted in the apartment are conventionally gendered (re-enacting a madonna/whore dichotomy), so to is Angie's public persona. Prior to her death, Angie takes on the public role of the "spurned woman" when she takes her children to stand across the street from the home where Derek lives with his wife (107-09; 240-41). She is at the mercy of Derek's mercurial interest in her and their children. While the chronology of events is somewhat unclear, Derek's anger at Angie's visit to his home is connected in the narrative to Angie's suicide (108). Because her involvement with Derek means that she is shut out of her own ethnic community, Angie is in an even less enviable position than either Jackie's or Tuyen's parents—she is effectively abandoned by any potential community.

These various spaces of codified difference—the Paramount and other clubs, the Vietnamese restaurant, and the apartment where Angie lives—show two different responses to the city's intransigence to its inhabitants who occupy positions of difference: temporary resistance through a counterpublic space or surrendering to prescribed expressions of difference. For all these first-generation characters, the public sphere is denied them because they are not *of* this place and, thus, separate from the dominant life of the city. All the places and spaces they occupy are predicated on their own marginalization from the sites of bureaucratic and political power in the city. For, while subaltern counterpublics have an emancipatory potential, they necessarily stem from a peripheral position. White bourgeois Toronto remains separate from their activities throughout.

Cosmopolitan Places in the Global City

The children of this first generation have a different sense of their position in Toronto. The cosmopolitan second-generation characters move fluidly between these different worlds instead of seeing only rigidly demarcated worlds with strict rules for entrance. While the white power centres of Toronto do not appear in the characters' movement through the city, the implication is that it is because these areas are of no interest. The *real* life of the city for these characters takes place in areas that would be rejected by the white elite of the city as dirty and dangerous. In these abandoned areas of the city, these characters are able to reassemble and recombine parts of the city in ways that acknowledge their own presence and force recognition of their experience of Toronto. Tuyen and Carla's apartments become a microcosm of this process. These "slum apartments" (25) are liberating places where they are able to break out of the confines of their parents' homes—Tuyen has even "surreptitiously broken down the wall between her bedroom and the kitchen . . . she had virtually destroyed the apartment" (25). Indeed they tolerate some of the problems of these apartments because "anything was better than home" (22). For Tuyen and Carla, their parents' homes are spaces that exist in an uneasy relation to the past—in Tuyen's case, the omnipresence of the lost son, Quy; for Carla, the attempts to forget Angie by Derek and Nadine. Thus, they are locked into certain set patterns. Particularly for Tuyen, the past in her parents' home is static—everything is laminated and covered in protective plastic to preserve it (63)—whereas in her apartment the past becomes intertwined with the present in her art. Tuyen memorizes and recopies the only letter her father wrote to try and find Quy with the intention of including it somehow in a project (24). Her *lubaio* reflects her desire to make the past useful but to avoid becoming marooned there as her parents and older sisters seem to be.

Tuyen's decision to make art that draws from Vietnamese tradition mirrors the dialectical and dialogical process of self-definition that all the second-generation characters undertake; "they all, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie, felt as if they inhabited two countries—their parents' and their own" (20). While these characters must come to terms with these opposing national affiliations, they remain rooted in Toronto in a way that their parents cannot be. Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie "ran across the unobserved borders of the city, sliding across ice to arrive at their own birthplace—the city. They were born in the city from people born elsewhere" (20). They locate Toronto as a provisional homeland yet "they'd never been able to join in what their parents

called 'regular Canadian life.' The crucial piece, of course, was that they weren't the required race" (47).¹¹

This conflict between the place where they situate their sense of belonging and that place's refusal to allow full identification pervades the lives of all the second-generation characters. The text, however, offers many moments where these characters attempt to bring some of the resistance of the counterpublic (such as the Paramount) into the heart of the public. These moments are particularly preoccupied with the characters' movement through place in the city. In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand describes the black driver of a Vancouver bus as "driving across a path which is only the latest redrawing of old paths. . . . He is the driver of lost paths" (220). These characters undertake a similar process; however, instead of finding lost paths, these characters create new paths, paths which suggest a different orientation to the city.

These new paths are a kind of *flânerie* or psychogeography that interrupts the patterns of the city. Walter Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur* "did not know where his thought should alight or what end he should serve, [so] his detached strolling, sitting, and reflecting, itself a type of intellectual consumption, yielded no identity. . . . he was allied entirely neither with the middle class nor yet with the metropolis" (Amato 174). While this in-betweenness (like that of the diasporic individual) suggests the difficulty of belonging, since the person does not fully belong to one place or another, the Situationists' conception of "psychogeography offered a sense of violent emotive possession over the streets" (Sadler 81) which then allows for a claim of belonging. Both ways of walking—the detached observation of the *flâneur* and the possessive drift of psychogeography—create a new way of thinking about metropolitan citizenship that is based on a re-imagining of public space as a place for more than just consumption and transportation.¹² Both Benjamin and the Situationists see walking as a potentially emancipatory act that reclaims the city for its inhabitants rather than its business interests. Unlike subaltern counterpublics, *flânerie* and psychogeography move into the city proper and are, therefore, a more visible inscription of resistance onto the city itself. Fraser suggests that "the concept of a counterpublic militates in the long run against separatism because it assumes an orientation that is *publicist*. In so far as these arenas are *publics* they are by definition not enclaves—which is not to deny that they are often involuntarily enclaved." (210; emphasis in original). This involuntary construction of counterpublics as enclaves is more easily avoided through *flânerie* and psychogeography, as

these are activities which take place in highly public places—sidewalks and highways—and therefore facilitate individual recognition of the city’s multiple places and spaces; as counterpublics are often driven by the development of a particular community, this recognition may not be as central to their development.

Brand is cautious in her claims about the possibility of movement inspired by *flânerie* and psychogeography. Jamal’s journey through the city towards the moment of Quay’s murder echoes Benjamin’s and the Situationists’ movement without a specified endpoint (316-18)—Jamal and Bashir know they want to steal a car but they do not know from where exactly. However, Jamal’s movement is tied explicitly to capitalist consumption—they travel past “used-car dealerships, dollar stores, cheap, ugly furniture stores, food stores, banks, and panicky ‘stop and cash’ booths” (316-17), discussing the relative merits of different luxury sports cars and car audio systems.

However, one instance of potentially emancipatory movement through the public places of the city occurs when Carla leaves Mimico Correctional Institute after visiting Jamal: she races through the city on her bicycle, going through Etobicoke, Runnymede, High Park, Bloor and Keele, Dundas, and by the lake. The unplanned course of this route echoes the psychogeography of the Situationists as “the drift [the physical action of psychogeography] was a combination of chance and planning” (Sadler 78). This non-linear journey at breakneck speed marks Carla’s attempt to write the city as she experiences it through her eyes and feet. Carla writes an urban text which contradicts the text the white bourgeois elite of the city has written for itself; she states that the “neat little lives” of those who live in the “upscale region of High Park” “make her [sick] to her stomach . . . [with] the cute expensive stores, the carapace of wealth” (29). Implicitly unlike Angie who, on her parallel walk (246-49), needs, but will not ask for, acknowledgement from those who hold power of whatever sort—the bus driver, the bank teller, the woman who runs the corner store (246-47), Carla is indifferent to the other inhabitants of the city on her ride and emerges feeling “a small *hopeful breeze*” (30; emphasis mine). Carla makes the city and its inhabitants acknowledge her, in a sense, through her incredible speed—it is hard to avoid noticing someone who moves through a place that quickly. For Angie, the other inhabitants of the city and the city itself have the agency to determine the course of her life to the extent that when they refuse to recognize her in ways to which she can respond, she kills herself. Carla, on the other hand, is the agent and the city is what she moves through. The city does not determine her actions the way

it does her mother's. Angie remains the object of the urban gaze whereas Carla situates herself as a fluid subjectivity who cannot be contained by the gaze because of her speed.

Angie's and Carla's different ways of seeing the city also draw attention to how the city is not just an assemblage of architectural and natural places but also consists of other, unknown inhabitants; the city is both a collection of human beings and buildings. Angie along with the other first-generation characters seems far more attuned to the human presence in the city and understands herself in relation to them and the recognition this human presence does or does not extend to them. Conversely, Carla (along with the other second-generation characters) understands the city primarily in architectural-spatial terms, an understanding of the city which reflects that of Benjamin and the Situationists. As Carla recognizes, Angie dreams of going elsewhere, whereas Carla herself "loved the city. She loved riding through the neck of it, the triangulating girders now possessed by the graffiti crew. She loved the feeling of weight and balance it gave her" (32). Carla's love of the city is thus tellingly understood in spatial terms. However, while Carla is aware of the impact of the material city on her understanding of herself, she along with the other second-generation characters find a community within which to recognize themselves. In celebrating a Korean win in the World Cup, the text depicts this community. Carla, Tuyen, and Oku celebrate alongside Korean, Brazilian, and Japanese fans (among others)—something which is impossible for the first-generation characters who are isolated along clearly defined ethnic lines. Unlike Angie, who is rejected by her family for her interracial relationship, Carla "wav[es] a Korean flag and sing[s] '*Oh, Pil-seung Korea*'" (219). While the World Cup can be an occasion of resurgent nationalisms that emphasize borders and boundaries, it also offers an opportunity for an expression of exuberant cosmopolitan citizenship—a form of citizenship that the second-generation characters all eagerly embrace. Moments like these during the World Cup are ones which make visible the interface between the human and spatial elements of the city as they break down, however briefly, the ghettoizing boundaries of the city. "The social order relies on boundary maintenance (of the body, identity, community, the state)—and the social order is, in so many ways, spatialized, and certain bodies make this process visible" (Holliday and Hassard 13); the bodies celebrating the World Cup make visible a moment where these boundaries are, at least temporarily, broken down. Nonetheless, while this World Cup celebration marks a moment of exuberant cosmopolitanism, it is temporary.

Once the World Cup tournament is over, the social order returns to “normal.” This end is made even more final when Jamal and Bashir murder Quy. While the novel finishes with this murder (Quy is presumed dead—though there is no authorial confirmation of this), the consequences of it are left unclear yet one might assume that the social boundaries broken down by the World Cup will be resurrected in some fashion.

Jackie’s clothing store, “Ab und Zu,” is another instance in the text which shows the uncertain longterm outcome of breaking down boundaries. The store is located “just on the border where Toronto’s trendy met Toronto’s seedy . . . and [she] had had the foresight to think that the trendy section would slowly creep toward Ab und Zu and sweep the store into money” (99). Like Jackie herself and her friends, the store is a porous interface between the past and the future (something which is only further highlighted by the store’s name—German for “now and then” (133). It acts as a physical manifestation of their sense of themselves in the metropolis yet also points to the constant potential for capitalist co-optation of liminal spaces and subjectivities—something which Jackie, in fact, desires.

The store is one place where Jackie leaves a trace of her existence as a black businesswoman; however, in her mind, she also re-imagines the city into a more beautiful place—leaving an imagined and idealistic trace of her desired existence. Jackie sees the lack of beauty and openness in the public housing where she lives and grew up as something which further exacerbates her parents’ (and the other inhabitants’) sense of loss over the Paramount and the people they once hoped to be. The apartment buildings with their narrow and dark hallways and the grounds that are covered in cement and asphalt contribute to the sense of hopelessness that Jackie does not want to become mired in. Sherene Razack suggests that “such spaces are organized to sustain unequal social relations and [such] relations shape space” (1)—something which Jackie echoes in her sense that “space [in the apartment buildings] might have triggered lighter emotions, less depressing thoughts, a sense of well-being. God, hope” (262).

To resist the lack of hope these buildings create, Jackie replants the city in her mind: “Between her parents and Vanauley Way, she wondered what she was going to do. She did them all a favour by making a plan. If the city didn’t have the good grace to plant a shrub or two, she would cultivate it with her own trees and flowers. And so she did. In her mind” (265). Jackie makes the city over in her mind, allowing herself to see the possibilities of the city, but she does so in a way that shifts these possibilities from a politics of struggle

to a more compromised politics of aesthetics. The newly planted city is a different city from that which her parents live in; it is a world where she sees possibilities instead of ever-narrowing realities. Yet this newly landscaped city exists only in Jackie's imagination. It cannot, therefore, be taken away like the Paramount was taken away from her parents nor can it provide a moment of real emancipation. By looking at the city in a new way and leaving imaginary traces of herself on it, Jackie imagines a vision of the city where she is a fully recognizing *subject*, not just a recognized *object*, yet this change remains imaginary. The graffiti crew, however, bring that vision to life through their various images painted throughout the city and, most explicitly, through the mural they create at the end of the novel where jungles co-exist with the CN Tower and elephants drink from Lake Ontario (302). Kumaran and his crew make physical images that echo Jackie's flowers yet, in physically representing these images, they cultivate the city in ways that Jackie only imagines.

Indeed, the way the graffiti crew in the text understands their work—“painting radical images against the dying poetics of the anglicized city” (134)—is equally true for all the work done by these second-generation characters: they all radically interject their own belonging into the sterile anglicized city. Instead of relying solely on counterpublic spaces which are predicated on their own marginalization, these second-generation characters radically reimagine public space, resisting the colonizing hegemony of the city's white bourgeois elite. Saskia Sassen suggests that

the global city is . . . the new territory where the contemporary version of the colonial wars of independence are being fought. But today's battles lack clear boundaries and fields: there are many sites, many fronts, many forms, many politics. They are battles being fought in neighborhoods, schools, court rooms, public squares. They are fought around curriculums, rights, identity. Their sites of resistance are streets, parks, culture, the body. (197)

The second-generation characters of *What We All Long For* are part of Sassen's battle to decolonize the city. They fight their colonization by both the white hegemony in the city that others them, and their parents' desire for them to remain tied to a homeland to which they have no physical connection. That Quy is murdered in Toronto rather than in the more unstable settings of displaced peoples' camps and the Thai criminal underworld suggests the impossibility of the return to the homeland that the first generation desires. The city acts as an interface between the individual and cultural representation and, therefore, displays received cultural values, yet the city

is where these values are most conducive to being subverted as we go about our daily business (Savage, Warde, and Ward 145). Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie work to make public spaces ones where hegemonic cultural values are not imposed, but where new, cosmopolitan identities can be forged.

NOTES

- 1 Benjamin 423.
- 2 In this article, I will be using “place” to denote sites determined primarily by materiality or fixed location. I will be using “space” to refer to sites that are either primarily symbolic, or simultaneously symbolic and material.
- 3 This fraught relationship is most clearly dramatized in Cam’s and Tuan’s relationship with Vietnam—a place which is the homeland and to which they feel a certain degree of commitment but is also the place where Quy, their eldest son, is lost and which is, therefore, the site of traumatic alienation.
- 4 Kit Dobson suggests that the power structures of Toronto seek to “reterritorialize drifting bodies, and ensuring their ongoing motion becomes a key concern in Brand’s novel as her characters mix and merge within Toronto” (90). The second-generation characters in the novel form “communities from below” (89) through this deterritorialized movement. I suggest, instead, that Brand’s characters territorialize themselves in ways that disrupt these “proper” forms of reterritorialization—homes in the suburbs, quiet, disciplined bodies in public places, and so on—that are imposed upon them.
- 5 A place whose invisibility in Toronto Brand foregrounds: it is “a prison kept like a secret” (28).
- 6 One place where the characters are not invisible is on the subway in the opening pages of the novel. However, they are shown to be violating conventional behaviour on the train—they are noisy and talk about love (2-3). The weight of this convention—silence in public spaces—eventually leads them to stop speaking altogether. They are, thus, taken from a moment of great visibility to one where they are as invisible as every other person in the train: they’re “common like so many pebbles, so many specks of dirt” (3).
- 7 Beverley Skeggs argues about this embodied (perceived) criminality that bodies “are the physical sites where the relation of class, gender, race, sexuality and age come together and are embodied and practiced” (quoted in Holliday and Hassard 3).
- 8 Carla, while the daughter of a white mother and black father and thus of mixed race, is also the only main character who can “pass” for white. Indeed, when she is first described in the novel, the narrator speculates that “she might be Italian, southern” (3).
- 9 Yet, as Molly McKibben suggests in an article about the possibilities of feeling at home in public places, “Tuyen is of Vietnamese ancestry, and Carla is described as so pale she is virtually unrecognizable as a Black woman, whereas Jackie and Oku are unmistakable Black, the novel further suggests that despite Toronto’s cultural diversity, Blackness is the least ‘normal,’ the least ‘at home’ in the Canadian city” (518). Tuyen’s Vietnamese parents are the only parents who are financially successful; Carla’s father, Jackie’s and Oku’s parents are apparently less financially successful.
- 10 Tuan is able to make use of his engineering training in the layout of the restaurant (67). Cam’s professional skills, however, remain unused—suggesting that the opportunities to resist assimilation (however infrequent or small) are even less accessible to her than to him.

- 11 Toronto as a cosmopolitan city in the novel seems to be separate from Toronto as a Canadian city. The city, for the most part, seems like an urban island unto itself with very little mention given to the country within which it is situated. Thus while the characters in the novel clearly territorialize their cosmopolitan subjectivities in the physical place of Toronto, the novel itself reiterates a common vision of the global cosmopolitan city as de-nationalized and even de-territorialized.
- 12 Marlene Goldman argues that Brand posits “drifting” as “an alternative to the boundedness of home and the nation-state.” However, in Goldman’s article and in Brand’s work, drifting is connected with identity construction and is also more suitably synonymous with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of deterritorialization. It is, therefore, somewhat more metaphorical and abstract a practice than the Situationist’s practice of drifting which refers to a specific action in urban centres and is less about identity construction *per se*.

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