D A V I D   T A V A R E S / M A R C   B R O S S E A U

The Spatial Politics of Informal Urban Citizenship

Reading the Literary Geographies of Toronto in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*

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Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Artikel nimmt eine geographische Lesart von Dionne Brands Roman What We All Long For *(2005) vor, der ein vielschichtiges Portrait des täglichen Lebens im heutigen multikulturellen Toronto entfaltet. Der Artikel untersucht, wie die Orte und Räume Torontos und ihre alltägliche Nutzung durch die Charaktere des Romans eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Gestaltung des urbanen Lebens und der Identitäten von Einwanderern der ersten und zweiten Generation spielen. Ausgehend von einer Diskussion der Generationenunterschiede stellt der Artikel die Beziehungen zwischen Raum und Identitätspolitik heraus, die zentral für die Darstellung der Stadt im Roman sind. Konkret wird argumentiert, dass* What We All Long For *eine machtvolle Repräsentation der politisierten sozio-räumlichen Prozesse entwickelt und verbreitet, durch die in Kanadas kulturell diversifiziertester Stadt '*informal urban citizenship*' angefochten wird. Der Fokus auf '*informal urban citizenship*' soll zeigen, wie sowohl dieser als auch andere Romane ein Teil der kontinuierlichen (Re-)Definition sozialer und kultureller Identitäten in zeitgenössischen multikulturellen Städten sind. Gleichzeitig versucht der Artikel darzustellen, welches Potential das Konzept der '*informal urban citizenship*' für die Forschung im Bereich literarische Geographie bietet und gleichzeitig, welches Potential Literatur als Ausgangspunkt für Untersuchungen der sozio-räumlichen Dimensionen dieses spannenden Konzepts darstellt.*

Abstract

This article offers a geographical reading of Dionne Brand's novel What We All Long For *(2005), which provides readers with an ambitious portrayal of everyday life in contemporary multi-cultural Toronto. The article considers how the places and spaces of Toronto, and their quotidian inhabitation by characters in the novel, play a key role in structuring the urban lives and identities of Brand's immigrant characters and their second-generation children alike. Through a discussion of generational differences, the article highlights the relationships between space and the politics of identity central to the novel's portrayal of the city. More concretely, it argues that* What We All Long For *generates and circulates a powerful representation of the polit-*

icized socio-spatial processes through which 'informal urban citizenship' is contested in Canada's most culturally diverse city. The focus on informal urban citizenship is intended to capture the embeddedness of this and other novels in the ongoing definition and redefinition of social and cultural identities in contemporary multi-cultural cities. At the same time, the article hopes to illustrate the potential of the concept of informal urban citizenship to inform research in the sub-field of literary geography and the potential of literature as a point of departure for exploring the socio-spatial dimensions of this fascinating concept.

Résumé

Cet article propose une lecture géographique du roman What We All Long For *de Dionne Brand (2005), récemment traduit en français sous le titre évocateur* Les désirs de la ville *(Brand 2011). Ce roman brosse un portrait ambitieux de la vie quotidienne dans le Toronto multiculturel contemporain. L'article examine comment l'espace et les lieux torontois, de même que les pratiques quotidiennes qu'en font les personnages du roman, jouent un rôle-clé dans la formation de la vie urbaine et l'identité des personnages immigrants et de leurs enfants (donc de seconde génération). À partir d'une analyse des différences intergénérationnelles, l'article met en lumière les rapports entre lieux et enjeux identitaires qui sont au cœur de la représentation de la ville. Plus concrètement, il suggère que ce roman génère et diffuse une représentation percutante des processus socio-spatiaux fortement politisés par l'entremise desquels la « citoyenneté urbaine informelle » est revendiquée dans la ville la plus culturellement plurielle du Canada. L'accent porté sur la citoyenneté urbaine informelle vise à souligner comment ce roman, et plusieurs autres, fait partie intégrante d'un processus de définition et redéfinition permanent des identités sociales et culturelles dans un contexte urbain multiculturel. Du coup, l'article cherche aussi à illustrer le potentiel du concept de citoyenneté urbaine informelle pour la géographie littéraire, de même que celui de la littérature pour explorer les dimensions socio-spatiales de ce concept fascinant.*

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1. Introduction

The subject of Dionne Brand's[1] recent novel *What We All Long For* is above all else the cultural diversity of contemporary Toronto, considered by many analysts

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1   Dionne Brand is one of Canada's foremost contemporary literary figures. Born in Trinidad in 1953, Brand immigrated to Canada 1970, settling in Toronto. Dionne Brand's literary career began with the publication of a collection of poetry in 1978 and in the intervening 30 years poetry has remained her most consistent mode of literary expression, her contributions having been recognized by a Governor General's Award and a Trillium Award as well as a number of other major Canadian literary awards and nominations. Perhaps the defining characteristic of Brand's poetry is its political resonance, engaging as it does experiences of racism, coloni-

to be one of the quintessential multi-cultural cities of the 21ˢᵗ century.[2] Her ambitious portrayal of multi-cultural Toronto is both a tale of marginalized immigrants associated with discrete ethno-racial communities and one of second-generation youth whose socio-spatial lives destabilize established categories of identity and belonging in the city. In the first instance, the novel chronicles the urban lives of four immigrant couples from a variety of backgrounds, depicting their trajectories in the city, their struggles and hardships, their states of mind and, most importantly to the geographer, the particular places and spaces that shape their experience of the city. Each of these experiences is informed by its own particularities, yet in all cases it can be argued that their urban lives are conditioned by structural forces that work through space to marginalize them socio-economically. In the second instance, attention is cast on the generation born to these immigrant couples. Here the narrative depicts the everyday urban lives, experiences and geographies of the novel's four main protagonists – Tuyen, Carla, Jackie and Oku – all of whom are close friends in their early twenties. In this case, the central theme of the novel becomes the reformulations of identity undergone by these second generation characters as they seek to define the terms on which they are inserted into the socio-cultural and spatial spheres of the city.

As geographers we were drawn to *What We All Long For* largely because it is a highly spatial novel in which the narrative action occurs in a diverse array of spaces – invariably named and evoked - across the city of Toronto. Indeed, the spatial qualities of the novel demand a reading that is sensitive to the relationship between the text's geographies and the development of the characters and their subjectivities. Consequently, in this article we focus on how the places and spaces of Toronto, and their quotidian inhabitation by characters in the novel, play a key role in structuring the urban lives and identities of Brand's immigrant characters and their second-generation children alike. Through a discussion of generation

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alism and cultural imperialism, women and sexism, migrant exile and displacement, homosexuality and heterosexism, and related questions of social identity, belonging and marginalization. Brand's first novel, *In Another Place, Not Here* was published in 1996 and followed up by a second novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, in 1999. Both novels are set largely in the Caribbean (with portions of the first also set in Canada) and explore the legacies of slavery, colonialism and white oppression – and the concomitant struggle for emancipation – through the lens of personal, familial, cultural and diasporic memory. *What We All Long For*, Brand's third and most recent novel, published in 2005, exhibits lines of continuity with her previous work, namely in its exploration of racism, migrant experience and social marginalization. It was released to widespread critical acclaim.

2 On Toronto, see also Fong (2006) and Anisef/Lanphier (2003). In keeping with Stuart Hall's (2000, 209) distinction, we use the hyphenated term 'multi-cultural' adjectivally to describe "the social characteristics and problems of governance posed by any society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their 'original' identity". We use the unhyphenated term 'multiculturalism' to describe "the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up".

differences in this regard, we seek to highlight the relationships between space and the politics of identity central to the novel's portrayal of multi-cultural Toronto. More concretely, we argue that *What We All Long For* generates and circulates a powerful representation of the politicized socio-spatial processes through which informal urban citizenship is contested in Canada's most culturally diverse city. Our focus on informal urban citizenship is intended to capture the embeddedness of this and other novels in the ongoing definition and redefinition of social and cultural identities in contemporary multi-cultural cities. It is also intended to be the basis upon which we seek to contribute both to recent literary geographical studies of urban novels and to scholarship on the spatial politics of informal urban citizenship, both of which fields are reviewed in the following section of the article.

2. Geography, Literature and Urban Citizenship

Literary Geographies of the City

Geographers have had a long and lively scholarly engagement with fictive literature on which a number of reviews have been written (Brosseau 1994, 2009, 2011; Hones 2008; Jones 2008; Sharp 2000; and Pocock 1988). Very sporadic at first, this engagement has become more intense since the 1970s and has indeed become somewhat "normalized" as a research pursuit since the advent of the 'cultural turn' in human geography that gained steam in the early 1990s. Conceptualized variously as a documentary source (by regional geographers in the 1960s and 1970s), a transcription of the experience of place (by humanistic geographers in the 1970 and 1980s), a reflection of the sociospatial conditions of its own production (by radical geographers in the 1980s), a source of alternative geographic epistemology, or as a situated cultural discourse intervening within the politics of representation (by various social and cultural geographers since the 1990s), literature has come to inform the research pursuits on a diverse range of questions (Brosseau 2009). For the benefit of our discussion, we will limit the contextualizing review to geographical scholarship that has concerned itself specifically with literary representations of urban space. This scholarship can be categorized into three streams of research based on thematic and theoretical concerns.

The first stream of research is characterized by the core dispositions of humanistic geography and includes scholarship that is concerned primarily with either the experience of urban space (Porteous 1987; Preston/Housley 1994; King/ Connell/White 1995; Gilbert/Simpson-Housley 1997) or sense of place (Hausladen/ Starrs 2005; Hausladen 2000) as captured in urban novels. Brosseau (1994) is critical of the humanistic approach to literary analysis in geography, arguing that it fails to problematize the process of representation and indeed textual interpretation by treating literature as a rather unproblematic, mimetic transcription of place experience and distinctiveness. Despite these limitations, humanistic read-

ings of literature were the first in geography to explore urban themes and established a valuable precedent for studying representations of urban space and its inhabitation in novels.

The second stream of research approaches literature as a source of geographical epistemologies – alternative ways of knowing and writing the city – that act as a complement or counterpoint to academic discourses (Brosseau 1995; Savary 2007; Matthey 2008). From this standpoint, particular consideration is afforded to the textual practices (use of language, narrative forms, generic conventions, etc) through which literary texts generate original geographies of the city rather than simply reflect those circulating in academic scholarship (LeBel/Tavares 2008; Brosseau/LeBel 2007; Kitchin/Kneale 2003; Johnson 1999; Howell 1998). We recently adopted this analytical approach in relation to *What We All Long For* in an article that considers how the narrative strategies employed in Brand's novel are particularly adept at capturing the plural and fragmented urban spaces and identities that geographers and other scholars have sought to theorize and describe in recent decades (Brosseau/Tavares 2008).[3] Consequently, in this piece we are less concerned with representational strategies than we are with representational content, which places us more in tune with the third stream of geographical research on literature.

The third stream is focussed on the cultural politics of identity played out in literary representations of urban life. It is underlain by the recognition that cultural identities and the representation thereof are political, given their embeddedness in the negotiation and contestation of meaning, recognition, status and power in the city. For literary geographers the emphasis has been on foregrounding the constitutive role of urban spaces and places in the novelistic representations of these negotiations and contestations. For example, several studies have considered how urban space is central to the definition and redefinition of racial, gendered and sexual norms in a variety of novels (Brosseau/Ayari 2005; Jazeel 2005; McKittrick 2000). Other studies have considered how literature depicts and ultimately subverts the socio-spatial regimes and identities that structure sectarian conflict (Stainer 2005, 2006). We take these studies and their underlying approach to representations of the city as the point of departure for our reading of *What We All Long For*. Having said this, we also seek to explore new thematic and theoretical terrain by focussing specifically on representations of the multi-cultural city with reference to the concept of urban citizenship.

Notwithstanding, several humanist studies concerned with the immigrant experience of the city in various historical contexts (King/Connell/White 1995), there has been a limited amount written by geographers on the intersection between

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3   This is why we will focus more on the substantive issues of informal citizenship and less on the formal aspect of the text that enables the novel to capture the various ways in which the city is experienced by the characters.

literature, identity and the contemporary multi-cultural city. That which has been written adopts a postcolonial perspective to highlight the ways in which hybrid or diasporic speaking positions associated with immigrant writers and their characters destabilize the problematic discourses of national and colonial identity (Jazeel 2003; Sharp 1994, 1996). Such work is more concerned with the transgressive potential of cultural flows and geographical displacement than with the everyday spatial negotiation of identity and difference in the multi-cultural city that most interests us. Indeed, the perspective it adopts tends to overlook geographical emplacement and everyday spatial practice as the site where identities are grounded and negotiated even in the current age of unprecedented global mobility (Smith 2005; Conradson/Latham 2005; Ley 2004; Cresswell 2002). Consequently, in line with Ash Amin, we see cities as nodes that gather and temporarily halt disparate global flows of people, culture, ideas, and capital to become "sites of heterogeneity juxtaposed within close spatial proximity". As such, cities give rise to what Amin refers to as a "politics of propinquity" that "may be read as a politics of negotiating the immanent effects of geographical juxtaposition between physical spaces, overlapping communities, contrasting cultural practices" (Amin 2004, 38-39; see also Massey 2004). It is this perspective that leads us to frame our reading of *What We All Long For* in terms of informal urban citizenship.

The Spatial Politics of Urban Citizenship

The concept of urban citizenship – like citizenship more broadly – can be thought of as having two dimensions that are at once interrelated and semi-autonomous. The first, often termed the 'formal' dimension, refers to the dynamics surrounding the legal rights and obligations of individuals or groups within an urban polity or the relationship between individuals or groups and the national polity of which they are a part as grounded in the vicissitudes of urban life (Dickinsen et al. 2005; Kurtz/Hankins 2005; Isin 2000; Painter/Philo 1995). The second dimension, referred to as 'informal', pertains to the socio-cultural practices and processes through which individuals and social groups negotiate the terms of their membership within the urban public. Informal urban citizenship has to do with identity and identification, social recognition, participation and influence and the ways in which these are variously acquired, interpreted, contested, and, importantly, denied in urban contexts (Secor 2003; Staeheli 2003; Sandercock 2003; Isin/Siemiatycki 2003; Isin 2002a; Holston 1999; Isin/Wood 1999). Consequently, many scholars tend to think of informal urban citizenship in terms of Lefebvre's notion of "the right to the city" (for example Secor 2003; Isin 2002b; Staeheli/Dowler 2002). As a concept, "the right to the city" implies more than access to existing entitlements or spaces, or to the unhindered accumulation of capital in a free market economy (Harvey 2006). Rather "the right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: rights to freedom, to individualization and socialization, to habitat and to inhabit" (Lefebvre 1996, 154). According to

Lefebvre, it implies the ability to participate in the creation of the city as an *œuvre*, a collective "work" produced by the actions and interactions of individuals and the social groups to which they belong (Mitchell 2003; McCann 2003). Crucially, for Lefebvre the definition of the city as a social space is a dynamic and contested affair among the various actors that make up the urban public, which is perhaps why "the right to the city" has proven so suggestive as a basis for conceptualizing the study of informal urban citizenship. Defined in this way, informal urban citizenship retains a dynamic of its own, but it is also drawn into the domain of formal urban and national citizenship as the means through which "individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand or maintain existing rights" (Isin/Wood 1999, 4). That is to say, the mobilization of culture and identity can be seen as a way of claiming the theoretical rights of formal citizenship in a substantive way (Veronis 2006; Sandercock 2003).

It is widely held that the politicization of identity is important to what Holston and Appadurai refer to as "the public calculus of citizenship" (Holston/Appadurai 1999, 8). Identity formation is central to urban citizenship because it is through the construction and performance of urban identities that social positioning is contested and the discourses that inform social relations are encountered and engaged (Secor 2003, 2004; Isin 2002a). That is to say, identity becomes political both as a property through which claims to informal urban citizenship are made and a basis upon which informal urban citizenship is denied or deferred through processes of social, economic and political exclusion. In either case, urban space plays a central role as the site where identities are generated and performed in relation to dialogical encounters with difference and broader discursive formations. As Isin writes,

> [s]pace, understood as a configuration, is thus never simply a passive background of becoming political. It is a fundamental strategic property by which groups…are constituted in the real world, and, through this constitution, structured as objective realities. Space as configuration can have no definite shape or form independent from the groups that constitute and are constituted by it and the strategies and technologies that are embodied in its constitution. (Isin 2002a, 49)

Indeed, a number of scholars have argued that urban space and the geography of the city shape the identity politics through which informal urban citizenship is contested and negotiated specifically in relation to contexts of urban multiculturalism (Amin 2006; Staeheli 2003; Isin 2002; Da Costa Gomes 2001). For example, several articles have focussed on mobilizations of public space (parades, celebrations, political demonstrations) as focal points for claims to informal urban citizenship by marginalized ethnic communities (Veronis 2006; Ehrkamp/Leitner 2003). Others have considered the way groups spatialize identity and negotiate

informal urban citizenship through the material appropriation and transformation of urban spaces, as in the formation of ethnic neighbourhoods and venues (Veronis 2007; Erkhamp 2005; Isin/Siemiatycki 2003). A third set of articles is more concerned with everyday spatial practices and how these negotiate the relationships, structures and discourses that impinge upon informal urban citizenship (Dickinsen et al. 2005; Secor 2003, 2004). Taken together, these various strands of research offer a valuable perspective and body of knowledge on socio-cultural relations in the multi-cultural city by focussing on the complex links between identity, urban space and informal urban citizenship.

Our decision to read Brand's novel with reference to the concept of informal urban citizenship in the multi-cultural city puts our work in a position to contribute to both bodies of scholarship reviewed above, namely literary geographies of the city and the geographies of urban citizenship. In the first instance, our study adds a new thematic dimension to existing geographical work on urban literature by analyzing representations of the spatial identity politics of everyday living in the contemporary multi-cultural city. In addition, we add a new theoretical dimension by illustrating how the notion of informal urban citizenship can act as a useful organizing concept for the growing number of literary geographical studies on urban identities. Indeed, we propose that the concept of urban citizenship offers geographers a theoretical framework for considering the broader implications of the relationships between urban spaces and identities they uncover through literary analysis. In the second instance, we argue that an analysis of Brand's novel highlights the potential of literature (and indeed other representational texts) to shape the geographical imaginary of interactions, negotiations and transformations taking place in today's multi-cultural city. We think of the geographical imaginary as embodying popular and academic conceptions of "the significance of space, place and landscape in the making and meaning of social and cultural life" (Schwartz/Ryan 2003, 9; see also Harvey 1990) that are shaped by a dialogical relationship between concrete geographies and their representation. As Ogborn notes, "neither spaces nor texts can be the *a priori* basis for the other. Instead, texts are part of the cultural production of spaces and spaces are part of the cultural production of texts" (Ogborn 2006, 146). Once this reciprocity is acknowledged, literature can be regarded as playing a formative role in the way both scholars and the reading public more generally think of urban identities and identity formation within the context of contemporary cultural pluralism in Toronto and other cities that ground global flows of people and culture.

3. Marginal Urban Citizenship: Brand's Immigrant Characters

While the focus of *What We All Long For* is on its four second-generation characters, a large portion of the novel is devoted to describing the urban lives and

experiences of their immigrant parents.[4] These immigrant characters form a useful starting point for our analysis insofar as they constitute an essential counterpoint in relation to which one can read the socio-spatial identities and informal citizenship practices of the second generation characters in the novel. The urban social identities of Brand's immigrant characters, and to a considerable extent their economic lives as well, are defined in relation to ethno-racial spaces in the city. While the novel does suggest that this is to some extent a matter of choice, in each case personal agency is overridden by powerful structural forces that work through urban space to impose and reinforce marginal ethno-racial identities upon the immigrant parents of the novel's main protagonists. These structural forces include ethnically defined economic opportunities, cross-cultural assumptions that shape particular social roles, and, not least, urban spaces that limit the entire life world of immigrants. Lacking agency over the terms of their inclusion within the social and economic spheres of the city, Brand's immigrant characters are effectively denied informal citizenship by spatialized structural forces beyond their control. While this argument holds for all immigrant characters in the novel, albeit with variations in each case, we will focus our discussion on Oku's parents and Tuyen's parents, The Barkers and Vus respectively, in order to allow space for a more nuanced exemplification of the point we wish to make.

Oku's parents Claire and Fitz Barker are Jamaican immigrants whose life-world revolves almost entirely around Toronto's Little Jamaica, which centres on a stretch of Eglinton Avenue West, northeast the city's downtown core.

> The whole strip of Eglinton between Marleed and Dufferin was full of West Indian stores selling hot food, haircuts, wigs, cosmetics, and clothes. There were stores selling barrels for stuffing goods to send families in the Caribbean and there were stores selling green bananas, yams, pepper sauce, mangos, and salt cod, all tastes from the Caribbean carried across the Atlantic to this strip of the city. Wrapped in oil and sugar and pepper, waxed onions and thyme; modified, hardened, and made acrid and stale by distance; hardly recognizable if any here were to really take a trip to where they once called home.
> This was how [Oku] experienced his mother and father each day. As people who somehow lived in the near past and were unable or unwilling to step into the present. (Brand 2005, 190)

This passage depicts a couple whose urban life is circumscribed by a space that is characterized by essentialized elements of Jamaican culture. The suggestion

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4   Strictly speaking, Jackie's parents – the Bernards – are not immigrants, but rather migrants to Toronto from Nova Scotia's long established Black community. Having said this, due to their race and class their experience of migrating to Toronto is very much in keeping with that of the novel's immigrant parents.

that they are "unwilling" to step beyond this ethno-spatial milieu suggests agency on their part, a conscious choice to remain rooted in their culture of origin. However, by positing Fitz as profoundly unhappy after decades in Toronto, the text lends more credence to the alternate notion that he and his wife are not so much "unwilling" as "unable" to move beyond an urban space and social position defined by their status as Jamaican immigrants. In an attempt to justify Fitz's bitterness and the occasional bouts of violence he unleashes on his family, Claire considers that "he only felt that he had been held back, and were he a different man in this country, he would be further ahead" (Brand 2005, 86). This oblique reference, perhaps to an undercurrent of racism and/or to the limited opportunities available to Jamaican immigrants in Toronto, suggests to the reader that broader structural forces are largely responsible for keeping Fitz and Claire from social and economic advancement in the city, at least not on terms of their choosing.

Powerful structural forces that work through urban space can also be said to impose an ethno-racially predicated social and economic identity upon Tuyen's Vietnamese immigrant parents, Tuan and Cam Vu. Having said this, the case of the Vus differs markedly form that of the Barkers (as well as Jackie's parents, the Bernards) insofar as Tuyen's parents undergo a process of socio-economic ascension that has eluded the black Jamaican couple. Moreover, unlike the other immigrant parents, Tuyen's parents are not associated with a single ethno-racially defined space in the novel, but rather with a series of urban spaces along an immigrant trajectory, the experience of which is nevertheless informed by their ethno-racial background. Yet, despite these differences their life in the city is no less conditioned by forces beyond their control.

Although Tuyen's mother (Cam) and father (Tuan) came to Canada with Vietnamese qualifications and work experience – she is a doctor and he is a civil engineer – they are not able to have their professional qualifications ratified by "the authorities" (Brand 2005, 65) in Canada despite repeated attempts to this effect. Unable to find meaningful employment in their respective fields, Tuan and Cam have little choice but to do comparatively menial jobs (he unloads crates at a grocery store while she gives manicures at a beauty salon). Eventually they scrape together enough savings to open a "hole-in-the-wall" Vietnamese restaurant – "The Saigon Pearl" – on the periphery of Chinatown.

> The restaurant became their life. They were being defined by the city. Once they accepted that, it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food. Neither Cam nor Tuan cooked very well, but how would their customers know? Eager Anglos ready to taste the fare of their multicultural city wouldn't know the differences. (Brand 2005, 66-67)

As this passage conveys unequivocally, the constraints faced by the Vus upon arrival in Canada set them on a trajectory that assigns them a social and economic identity based on their race – which determines where they work in the city (i.e. Chinatown) – and their Vietnamese ethnicity – which underpins the family business. More specifically, the passage suggests that this identity is in part imposed by the market for "ethnic" food created by White Anglophone Torontonians, who can also be seen as representative of the "authorities" that have conditioned the lives of the Vus in Toronto (a point that will be developed later in the article).

Ironically, once they have accepted their role as "Vietnamese Food," Tuyen's parents become financially successful. Yet their financial success does not lead them to reconcile with the urban identity they had to adopt in order for affluence to be achieved. Quite to the contrary, with the money they earn from the restaurant, the Vu's move to the new suburb of Richmond Hill, commuting daily to operate their restaurant in Chinatown. In the novel's words:

> Richmond Hill is a sprawling suburb outside the city. It is one of those suburbs where immigrants go to get away form other immigrants, but of course they end up living with all the other immigrants running away from themselves – or at least running away from the self they think is helpless, weak, unsuitable, and always in some kind of trouble. They hate that self that keeps drawing attention, the one that can't fit in because of colour or language, or both, and they think that moving to a suburb will somehow eradicate that person once and for all. And after all the humiliations of being that self – after they've worked hard enough at two or three jobs and saved enough by overcrowding their families in small dour rooms and cobbled together enough credit – immigrants flee to rangy look alike desolate suburbs like Richmond Hill where the houses give them a sense of space and distance from the troubled image of themselves. (Brand 2005, 54)

This is a powerful passage in which Cam and Tuan are depicted as being uncomfortable with the imposed identity that forms the basis of their membership in the social and economic spheres of the city. This discomfort is such that they sequester themselves in a "desolate and rootless" neighbourhood in an effort to separate themselves as far as possible from the spaces in which their urban identity took shape, namely Chinatown, The Saigon Pearl restaurant and environs. Here, far from being able to achieve distance from "the troubled image of themselves", they live a deeply troubled existence among other immigrants said to be in a similar position. Indeed, more than anything else, the distance offered by this move seems to emphasize the limited agency that Tuyen's parents possess with respect to defining the terms of their inclusion within the imagined urban community of Toronto.

4. Resisting Marginal Urban Citizenship: Brand's Second Generation Characters

The four main characters of the novel – Tuyen, Oku, Carla and Jackie – all resist adopting the ethnically and racially based socio-spatial identities associated with their parents. This resistance is enacted through a strategy of spatial avoidance that sees the four characters distance themselves from the spaces of the city in which they were raised. In one sense, their behaviour constitutes an intergenerational rejection of the norms and expectations associated with the imported culture of their immigrant parents. Yet it can also be regarded as a more fundamental refusal to build an urban social identity in relation to the social networks and economic opportunities available to them within the ethno-racially bounded spaces that circumscribe the lives of their parents in the city. Put differently, Brand's four main characters resist being denied informal urban citizenship by the same forces that impinge upon their parents. Insofar as this is so, the main characters also stand in contrast to their second generation siblings and peers, many of whom adopt socio-spatial identities that are based on ethnic and/or racial criteria. Consequently, the novel represents Tuyen and her friends as being engaged in more than a standard and predictable disengagement with their immigrant background that might somehow be expected to occur among all second-generation individuals. Rather, the agency with which they resist externally imposed socio-spatial identities based on ethnicity and race is their starting point for a claim to informal urban citizenship that involves spatially negotiated process of subject formation. Once again, due to space constraints, we will develop our argument by focussing on two of four possible cases: those of Tuyen and Oku.

Early in the novel we learn that the four main characters became friends in high-school, drawn together in part by their common desire to distance themselves from their immigrant families. As teenagers, all four are described as failing to empathize with the imagined ideal their respective parents retain of their countries of origin. They longed for "[n]o more stories of what might have been, no more diatribes on what would never happen back home, down east, down the islands, over the South China Sea, not another sentence that began in the past that had never been their past" (Brand 2005, 47). Although all of them are described as having felt the same way, Tuyen is clearly the most outwardly rebellious. As a youth she rails against all things Vietnamese, refusing to speak the language, cultivating a purposeful dislike for the food, and resisting the "admittedly ambivalent efforts to enforce Vietnamese rules" (Brand 2005, 125) on the part of her parents.

> Why had she wanted as far back as she could remember to "not be them"? Not be Vietnamese. It was nothing that they had taught her. They were so definitely who they were. She felt outside of herself, outside of them. (Brand 2005, 69)

Tuyen is fundamentally unable and unwilling to define any aspect of her "self" in relation to the Vietnamese identity of her family. Adulthood having brought no mollification to these feelings, Tuyen moves out of the family home in Richmond Hill shortly after coming of age. She avoids visiting at all costs and on the rare occasions she does, the house in Richmond Hill acts as a visceral reminder of her family's 'Vietnameseness'.

Tuyen's decision to distance herself, both literally and figuratively, from the Vietnamese spaces of her parents – namely the family home and The Saigon Pearl restaurant – stands in marked contrast to her siblings. Her older sisters, Lam and Ai, have internalized the "duty", "obligation," "honour," and "viselike grip of emotional debt" (Brand 2005, 61) exacted by their parents' Vietnamese values, all of which Tuyen rejects and seeks to escape. However, perhaps the more interesting comparison is between Tuyen and her brother, Binh, who, like her, was born and raised in Toronto. As Brand writes "[p]erhaps in their family it was he and she who were the closest, if not in affections then in all other ways; in the geography of their experiences" (Brand 2005, 157). Despite this, Tuyen and Binh react to these geographies and the experiences they gave rise to in fundamentally different ways. Binh defines his 'self' partly in relation to the ethno-cultural space of the family household in which, as the only male child, he occupies a privileged position in the family hierarchy, a position he reinforces by conforming, on the surface at least, to the cultural expectations placed upon him by his parents. Secure in this gendered cultural role, he enjoys the freedom to go about his life with seemingly limited interference from his parents, who probably have little sense that their son is involved in people trafficking schemes and the manufacture of recreational drugs (Brand 2005, 122-3). Thus, rather than distancing himself from it like Tuyen, Binh uses the ethnic space of the family home strategically, benefiting as a result. The same can be said for the family restaurant, in which Binh takes an active, if "spasmodic" interest, using it as a meeting place for his friends and associates. This is significant because, as we saw in the previous section, the restaurant is a defining element of the urban identity forced upon Tuan and Cam by broader structural forces in the city. For Tuyen it is an ethnically and racially infused space to be actively avoided, whereas for Binh it offers an opportunity to court favour with his parents by taking an interest in the family business while simultaneously facilitating his own social relationships and shady business dealings. The difference between the two siblings is considerable – one rejects Vietnamese ethnicity and the racialization that comes with it as a basis for social identification, whereas the other seeks to profit from his position as the child of Vietnamese immigrants.

Oku has the most nuanced and internally conflicted relationship with the ethno-racial space in which he was raised. He clearly finds the urban social identity of his parents, which revolves entirely around Little Jamaica, as limited and backward looking. Yet, he retains social links with other black youth from the neighbourhood and the possibility of self-definition in relation to the black youth cul-

ture of Little Jamaica and "The Jungle" (a.k.a. the neighbourhood of Lawrence Heights) nearby is an ever present possibility. Yet, despite holding some allure to him, he cannot seem to internalize the way his friends present themselves to the world as his own:

> [Oku] found hanging with the guys exhausting. Yes he could become the bad public hard-ass kind of black man everyone appreciated. Everybody knew it was bullshit. The leather coats, the dark glasses, the don't-give-a-shit attitude. All that television talk had made it to the street, or was it the other way around? You slapped a few bitches in the mall and faced down a few dickheads in the alleyways. Underneath it all you loved babies, played video games, and loved your mother's cooking and loved nobody like your mother. So much energy put out just fronting. And you sometimes forgot you were only fronting. You were dangerous. There was a kind of romance about that dangerousness, and Oku teetered at times in that alluring space. (Brand 2005, 164)

Oku's vacillation is put to the test by his friend Kwesi, who tries to recruit him into a criminal scheme that involves acquiring and selling off stolen merchandise. Insofar as he is broke and dreads the idea of working on a construction site with his father, the idea appeals to Oku, who also looks upon the trappings of Kwesi's gangster lifestyle – the expensive leather coats, the Lincoln Navigator, and the plush apartment – with no small sense of envy. It is thus significant that, despite the possibility of being labelled a "flake" or a "faggot" (Brand 2005, 166), Oku chooses not to meet Kwesi at a prearranged time and begins to avoid Little Jamaica and "The Jungle" altogether. Oku's decision stems in part from fear of being arrested, but even more so from his feeling that Kwesi and others like him "were in prison, although the bars were invisible" (Brand 2005, 166). By turning his back on this socio-spatial milieu, Oku is declining to be identified according to what the novel represents as a limited and limiting form of ethno-racial belonging.

Moreover, in doing so, Oku is also resisting the imposition of the racist apparatus that has been brought to bear so heavily on his friends. The novel describes how, throughout his life, Oku has been the target of periodic police harassment due to the colour of his skin. However, unlike his friends, Oku does not allow the city's racist authorities the opportunity to further impact his life:

> Whenever he encountered them [the police], he simply lifted his arms in a crucifix, gave up his will and surrendered to the stigmata. Some of his friends didn't. They resisted, they talked, they asserted their rights. That only caused more trouble. They ended up in the system fighting

to get out. They ended up hating everyone around them. Homicidal. (Brand 2005, 165)

For Oku, temporary humiliation is the price he pays to retain agency over his life and social identity in the city. In effect, by choosing not to identify himself as part of the black youth subculture of the Little Jamaica and "the Jungle", Oku resists the racialization of his urban social identity by his peers and the urban authorities alike.

5. Contesting Space, Identity and Informal Urban Citizenship in Downtown Toronto

Unwilling to base their urban social identities on the ethnic and racialized spaces associated with their families and peers, Brand's four main characters are faced with the need to seek our alternative spaces of subject formation. From a young age "the city" itself becomes a site of self-definition:

> Each left home in the morning as if making a long journey, untangling themselves from the seaweed of other shores wrapped around their parents. Breaking their doorways, they left the sleepwalk of their mothers and fathers and ran across the unobserved borders of the city, sliding across the ice to arrive at their own birthplace – the city. They were born in the city of people born elsewhere. (Brand 2005, 20)

The idea of being born in the city is both literal and figurative, in the latter case pertaining to the city as an arena in which they come into being, both as individual subjects and as an autonomous social group. More specifically, it is through the quotidian inhabitation of specific urban spaces – the geographies of everyday life in the city – that their individual subjectivity and group identity takes shape in the novel. Of course the same could be said for the parents, yet the difference here lies in the agency with which the main characters are depicted as "breaking their doorways" to "run across the unobserved borders of the city", refusing to be contained by its internal boundaries – at once social and spatial – that circumscribe the urban lives of their parents and peers. During the contemporaneous time-frame of the novel, the everyday geographies of the main characters are firmly centred on a variety of spaces within the city's downtown (see map 1), which for all four characters constitutes a chosen alternative to the ethno-racial spaces in which they were raised. Their experience of downtown Toronto is shaped in large measure by the propinquity of various forms of social difference. It is precisely through an engagement with the socio-spatial heterogeneity of downtown Toronto that Brand's second generation characters formulate an alternative, politicized urban identity that acts as a basis upon which to claim informal urban citizenship.
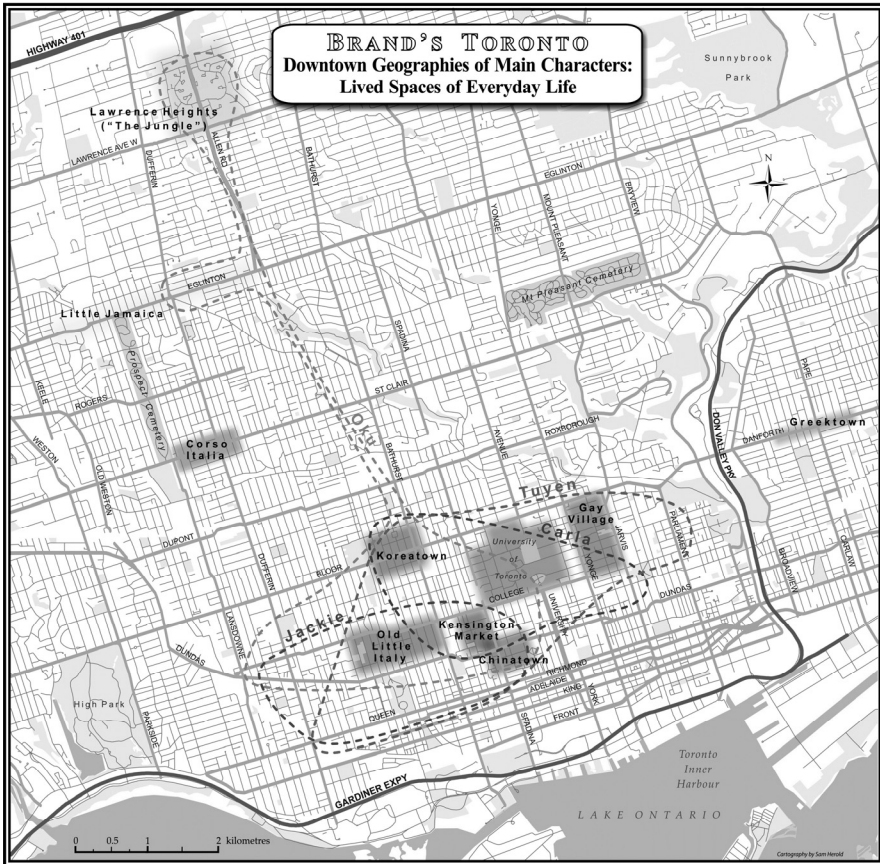
Map 1: Brand's Toronto

As previously noted, shortly after coming of age Tuyen moved out of the family home in Richmond Hill and into a run-down apartment on College Street in downtown Toronto. For Tuyen, moving to downtown Toronto not only constitutes an escape from her family and its associated spaces; it is also a gravitation towards an alternative and altogether more attractive set of urban spaces filled with the potential for self-definition. As Brand writes, "she wanted to be downtown, in the heat of it" (Brand 2005, 61). "It" in this case is a part of Toronto where she can immerse herself amidst the city's "unlimited permutations of existence" (Brand 2005, 5), where "on any given day, on any particular corner, on any particular cross roads, you can find the city's heterogeneity, like some physical light" (Brand 2005, 142). Wandering the streets for inspiration and content for her artwork, the city's "polyphonic murmuring" surrounds her, mixing in the air to form "a new kind of

vocabulary" (Brand 2005, 149). In this space, writes Brand "[n]o matter who you are, no matter how certain you are of it, you can't help but feel the thrill of being something else" (Brand 2005, 155). Amidst the diversity of downtown Toronto, Tuyen has an opportunity to explore subjectivity beyond the rigidly defined social and spatial parameters offered by her family. For Tuyen, downtown Toronto is a space where identity can be renegotiated in relation to multiple intersecting forms of difference.

The Korea/Japan 2002 FIFA World Cup presents and opportunity for Tuyen to immerse herself in the sort of diversity that attracted her to Toronto in the first place.

> Tuyen loved World Cup. She loved being in the middle of whirling people, people spinning on emotion. She'd been with her camera to every street party this June. To Little Italy, to the English pub, where the reactions are as exuberant as a soccer riot in Manchester but contained within four walls; she stood outside of the German pub and was shy to take pictures; at the Brazilian cervejaria on College she danced the samba in-between shots. Today she heard the honking horns heading up to Bloor Street, and she collected her gear and raced up Bathurst to Korean Town. (Brand 2005, 204)

This passage is a symbolic amplification of the constant encounter with difference that marks her everyday life in downtown Toronto, allowing her to step beyond the 'Vietnameseness' she so vehemently rejects. The almost 'carnivalesque' atmosphere of the World Cup fosters a set of experiences through which Tuyen disrupts the ethno-racial identity assigned to her family.

In similar fashion to Tuyen, for both Jackie and Oku downtown Toronto constitutes a departure from the ethno-racial spaces in which they were raised as well as an alternative space of subject formation. Jackie's chosen way out of the stagnation and despair of Alexandra Park is to open a small clothing store on Queen Street West, "on the border where Toronto's trendy met Toronto's seedy" (Brand 2005, 99). On his part, Oku gravitates toward Kensington Market in his attempt to distance himself from his parents and social connections in Little Jamaica and The Jungle. Brand's choice to connect her main characters with these two urban spaces – Queen Street West and Kensington Market – is significant in relation to our argument given their strong symbolic association with urban diversity in Toronto.

A focal point of the everyday geographies of all four main characters in downtown Toronto is the run-down apartment building on College Street where Tuyen and Carla rent small flats across the hallway from each other. As a space of social interaction, the apartment plays an important role in the reformulations of self and social identity undergone by Brand's second generation protagonists. When the main characters (and the secondary characters that form their social circles in

downtown Toronto) converge there, the College Street apartments effectively become a condensed expression of the intersecting diversity that characterizes their other downtown geographies. For example, in Chapter 11 the reader finds Oku in Carla's apartment cooking an impromptu meal for Tuyen, Carla, Jackie (who is not present but expected), as well as their friend Kamaran, (whose parents hail from Tamil Nadu) and his multi-cultural graffiti crew. Like the 'fusion' meal being prepared by Oku, the social circle present is characterized by ethno-cultural and racial plurality. Not so much despite as because of this plurality, there is an almost palpable sense of community, belonging, and solidarity amongst the individuals present that none of the main characters experience in the ethno-racial spaces from which they hail. A new constituency is thus forged, one that simultaneously draws upon and transcends the diversity of its members.

For Brand's four second-generation characters the basis for identification and social positioning does not centre primarily on their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality or any other such category of affiliation (which is not to say that these do not play a part in shaping who they are). Instead, their urban identity is located, both literally and figuratively, at the interstices of these various forms of social difference. Theirs is an affiliation with 'diversity' or 'plurality' itself rather than any of the relatively discrete identities that, mosaic like, make-up what is often regarded as urban diversity. The following passage, in which Tuyen, Oku and Carla share a reflective moment gazing out the window of a bar in the early evening, explicitly states what the book otherwise illustrates through its depiction of the everyday social and spatial lives of Tuyen and her friends:

> They saw the street outside, its chaos, as their only hope. They felt the city's violence and its ardour in one emotion. It was dark now; the rainy summer light had descended. The water glistened on everything – cars, neon signs, newspaper boxes, people. The blind singer across the street in from of the movie theatre packed up his tuneless voice, going home; teenaged boys hobbled along in too-big jeans; girls holding cigarettes between French tipped nails walked briskly by. Next door the Lebanese shawarma place, which had been a doughnut shop, and had once been an ice cream store, and would in another incarnation be a sushi bar, now exhaled odours of roasted lamb. A stream of identities flowed past the bar's window: Sikhs in FUBU, Portuguese girls in DKNY, veiled Somali girls in Puma sneakers, Colombian teenagers in tattoos. [By using the phrase 'border crosser'] Carla had said it all […] about all of them. Trying to step across borders of who they were. But they were not merely. They were, in fact, borderless. (Brand 2005, 212-213)

It can be argued that the socio-spatial identity negotiated by Tuyen and company during their geographies of everyday life in downtown Toronto thus offers two things: i) an alternative basis for inserting themselves into the social world of the city on fundamentally different terms to their parents and peers, and ii) a means of resisting the structural forces that work through space to condition the lives of their parents and peers by imposing narrowly defined ethno-racial identities and limiting economic opportunities. With respect to the latter point, the reformulations of identity undergone by Brand's second generation characters can also be read in relation – or indeed in opposition – to a dominant constellation of identity/power identified by the novel as White, Anglo-European Toronto. Much in the same way as they rejected the ethno-racial identities of their parents, from a young age, Tuyen, Oku, Carla and Jackie exhibit a youthful refusal to define themselves according to (what they perceive as) the mainstream alternative:

> 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. Not that that guaranteed safe passage, and not that one couldn't twist oneself up into the requisite shape; act the brown-noser, act the fool; go on as if you didn't feel the rejections, as if you couldn't feel the animus. They simply failed to see this as a possible way of being in the world. (Brand 2005, 47)

Brand's characters consider themselves to be a priori excluded from the city's charter group by virtue of their race. They respond to this not by actively seeking inclusion (as their parents would have them do), but by fundamentally rejecting it as a basis for social identification. The mainstream they so vehemently reject is only obliquely described by Brand, its defining criteria essentialized in the novel as being racially white, Anglo-European, and powerful.[5] Yet such a characterisation is sufficient for a Canadian readership to assume the author is referring to Toronto's (and indeed Canada's) established, politically and economically dominant population of British origin, a group that can be expanded to include assimilated individuals of other white-European origins.[6] While characters belonging to

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5   For references describing the dominance of this group in Canada, see Day 2000, Mackey 2002 and Hier/Bolaria 2006.

6   See Siemiatycki et al. (2003). They note that during the first half of the 20th century Toronto was widely regarded as "a British bastion of Orange Protestantism". Today, with the (admittedly uneven) assimilation of other groups of White-European origin, political and economic power in Toronto is less exclusive to those of strictly British Protestant origin, but rather lies in a more broadly defined White Anglo-European constituency. "The socio-economic polarization of Toronto can be characterized with little oversimplification, as a division between Toronto's white European-origin population and the non-white population from every other continent. […] Toronto today appears to have its own litmus (colour) test of advantage and

this group are conspicuously absent from the novel, as a constellation of identity/power it remains an ever present entity, an Other against which Tuyen, Oku, Carla and Jackie's position their emerging socio-spatial urban identity. Its presence is perhaps most palpably, if nonetheless implicitly, felt as the driving force behind the structural forces that condition the lives of the main characters' parents and which the second generation characters themselves must overcome if they are to insert themselves into the social world of the city on terms of their own choosing.

Within the narrative economy of Brand's text, Tuyen and her friends essentially appropriate downtown Toronto as a space of subject formation and in so doing resist the structural influences of Toronto's dominant constellation of identity/power. Seen in this way, the emergent urban identity of the novel's main characters becomes overtly political, a means through which they contest their 'right to the city' of Toronto. This notion is supported by the following passage wherein the narrator reflects on the symbolic currency of the work done by Kumaran's graffiti crew in relation to the constituency represented by Tuyen and her friends.

> [The graffiti crew] saw their work – writing tags and signatures – as painting radical images against the dying poetics of the anglicized city. The graffiti crew had filled in the details of the city's outlines. You could see them at night, very late, when the streets seemed wet with darkness, agile and elegant in their movements. The spiritual presences of Tuyen, Oku and Carla's generation. Their legs straddling walls and bridge girders and subway caverns, spray painting their emblems of duality, their dangerous dreams. (Brand, 2005, 134-5)

The crew's work is thus offered to the reader as a visual embodiment of the otherwise intangible presence of Brand's second generation characters in downtown Toronto. Like the graffiti itself, this presence claims space in the name of a particular (political) constituency and in so doing subverts an established order that works through space to assert its power over the city and its residents.

6. Conclusion

> So literature is an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life. (Nussbaum 1990, 48)

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disadvantage." This has prompted concerns over the emergence of an ethno-racially defined underclass in Toronto. (373, 419)

Brand's novel offers a complex and multifaceted portrayal of identity politics in multi-cultural Toronto. Within this portrayal, urban spaces and the negotiation thereof are assigned a central role in the formation of urban identities and the concomitant production and contestation of informal urban citizenship. In this regard, *What We All Long For* represents urban space as a both a mechanism through which immigrant characters are marginalized by structural forces and an ambiguous resource through which second generation characters exert agency over their positioning within the imagined urban community of Toronto. This has clearly been the focus of our spatial reading of the novel. However, it is also important to foreground that the inhabitation and activation of urban spaces in the novel contributes to their reciprocal constitution as geographical entities both within and beyond the confines of the text. Thus, the novel not only generates and circulates politicized spatial identities; it also shapes the identities of places across Toronto (as well as the identity of the city as a whole). In either case, Brand encourages her readership to regard everyday urban spaces as the 'ground zero' of urban citizenship in the multi-cultural city, as the site where difference is contained, encountered, negotiated.

As a signifying practice, literature not only reproduces the types of power infused discourses highlighted by Michel Foucault, but, as Habermas suggests, it can also contribute to a reimagining of the socio-cultural and spatial world around us (Habermas 1987). Furthermore, as Côté suggests in line with Bakhtin's understanding of literature's sociological relevance, "the novel not only allows for an understanding of a particular social and ideological context, but because of its very form, it becomes a medium which necessarily transcends this context and addresses issues well beyond its own present, towards the past or the future" (Côté 2003, 502-3, our translation)[7]. Brand's novel does so by generating and circulating representations of everyday negotiations of urban citizenship in the multi-cultural city. More specifically, through the production of fictional narrative Brand in effect executes Wood and Gilbert's call for discussions about Canadian cultural pluralism to move beyond attention to policy discourses and ideologies toward everyday interactions and encounters in urban public spaces where culture and politics are performed Wood/Gilbert 2005). It also resonates with Amin's focus on the "prosaic negotiations" of difference and the "micropolitics of everyday social contact" (Amin 2002, 969 and 959) as starting points for engaging and ultimately re-imagining intercultural relations in the multi-cultural city (Body-

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7   In extenso, Côté writes, "on peut considérer le roman, d'un point de vue sociologique, comme une expression en général beaucoup plus profondément « significative » que la simple parole, beaucoup mieux élaborée que cette dernière également. En tant que forme expressive, le roman permet non seulement de comprendre un contexte social et idéologique donné, mais à cause même de la forme qu'il développe, il devient un médium qui transcende nécessairement ce contexte, pour rejoindre des interrogations dépassant très largement, vers le passé et l'avenir, son propre présent" (Côté 2003, 502-3).

Gendrot 2002). In practice, through the way she represents the spatial identities of her second generation characters, Brand generates what Walcott refers to as an "everyday multiculturalism" that "requires us to think about the lives people make across difference and, importantly, connections that produce new modes of rationality and being" (Walcott 2007, 19). Thus, we can begin to appreciate how this timely and engaged novel has the potential to shape the geographical imaginary of informal urban citizenship in the multi-cultural city.

Future research on this novel might consider , in more concrete terms, how it challenges or contradicts discursive framings of multiculturalism in Canada and discuss how its reception in the popular media places it at the centre of debates about cultural pluralism in Canadian cities. In addition, there is considerable potential to cast the analytical focus more directly on gender as a form of difference through which urban space and citizenship are constituted and reconstituted in the novel's representation of contemporary Toronto. While this article has touched on Brand's representation of gendered roles, particularly as these intersect with ethnic and racial identities, the novel undoubtedly offers the opportunity to consider more fully how literary representations can produce and circulate a gendered imaginary of both urban citizenship and multiculturalism.

Acknowledgements

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