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Literary Representations of Second-Generation Youth in Toronto and London**

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**INFORMAL URBAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE
MULTICULTURAL CITY: LITERARY
REPRESENTATIONS OF SECOND-GENERATION
YOUTH IN TORONTO AND LONDON**

David Tavares

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the PhD degree in Geography

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■ ■ ■
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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the representation of second-generation characters (i.e. the children of immigrants) in three recent novels: *What We All Long For* (2005) by Dionne Brand (set in Toronto), *Tourism* (2006) by Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal and *Londonstani* (2006) by Gautam Malkani (both set in London, UK). The analysis of these novels focuses on the textual relationships established between the experience of everyday urban spaces and the production of identity among the characters. The politics that emerge from the spatial negotiation of identity depicted in the novels is taken as a point of departure for considering how the novels represent 'informal urban citizenship' among second generations in multicultural Toronto and London. The relevance of the representations identified is considered in terms of how they contribute to current scholarly debates on the politics of cultural pluralism in Canada and the UK. In this way the politics of identity in urban space are vertically connected to those surrounding diversity and difference at the national scale. Further justification for the study is offered on the basis that literary representations can contribute to the constitution of powerful socio-geographical imaginaries surrounding second generations in the multicultural city. In terms of its contributions, the thesis builds on several bodies of contemporary scholarship. First, it contributes a new thematic dimension (centred on the representation of second generations) and theoretical dimension (centred on the concept of informal urban citizenship) to recent geographical scholarship on the politics of space and identity

associated with literary representations. Second, it advances the theorization of literature as an object of study for geographers. Third, it adds the perspective of representational analysis to a growing body of scholarship on the spatial dimensions of informal urban citizenship among communities of recent immigrant origin. Fourth, and finally, it furthers a geographical perspective on the politics of cultural pluralism in Canada and the UK discussed in a large, interdisciplinary body of literature.

RESUMÉ

Cette thèse étudie la représentation des personnages de deuxième génération (c'est-à-dire les enfants d'immigrants) dans trois romans contemporains : *What We All Long For* (2005) de Dionne Brand (qui a lieu à Toronto), *Tourism* (2006) de Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal et *Londonstani* (2006) de Gautam Malkani (qui ont tous deux lieu à Londres). L'analyse de ces romans se concentre sur les relations entre l'expérience quotidienne de l'espace urbain et la production d'une identité chez les personnages. La mise en lumière des rapports de pouvoir qui émergent de la négociation des identités dans l'espace sert de point de départ pour analyser de quelle manière ces romans représentent une « citoyenneté urbaine informelle » au sein de la seconde génération d'immigrants de Toronto et de Londres. La pertinence de ces représentations est motivée par leur contribution aux débats contemporains sur la politique du pluralisme culturel au Canada et au Royaume-Uni. Ainsi, les enjeux politiques des identités dans l'espace urbain sont-ils verticalement liés à ceux qui touchent la diversité et la différence à l'échelle nationale. De plus, les représentations littéraires contribuent à la constitution d'imaginaires géographiques puissants. Cette thèse s'appuie sur un large éventail de disciplines et de réflexions contemporaines en même temps qu'elle enrichit leurs travaux. Premièrement, elle contribue aux dimensions thématiques (axées sur la représentation de la seconde génération) et théoriques (axées sur le concept de citoyenneté urbaine informelle) des débats géographiques portant sur les rapports

de pouvoir, l'espace et l'identité en relation avec l'expression littéraire. Deuxièmement, elle continue la mise en valeur de l'analyse de la littérature comme objet d'étude pour les géographes. Troisièmement, la perspective représentationnelle participe à l'éventail de travaux sur les dimensions spatiales de la citoyenneté urbaine informelle au sein des communautés d'immigrants récents. Finalement, elle participe à la réflexion géographique sur les rapports de pouvoir inhérents au pluralisme culturel au Canada et au Royaume-Uni qu'abordent plusieurs disciplines.

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INTRODUCTION

Beginnings

It was purely by chance that I read Rinaldo Walcott's (2005) review of Dionne Brand's novel *What We All Long For* (2005) published in a Saturday edition of the *Globe and Mail*. I had rescued the book review section from a pile of newspapers destined for the recycling bin, intending for its reprieve to last only until the kettle boiled. Then I came upon the review of *What We All Long For*, which describes a novel about four second-generation Torontonians, the children of immigrant parents from a variety of backgrounds, negotiating the "complexities and complications" (2005, p. D6) of everyday life in one of the world's most culturally diverse cities. For Walcott, Toronto is more than a mere backdrop for the novel's action. Rather, it "is magnified and specified as its own unique place" and constitutes "as central a character as any other in the novel (2005, p. D6)." As a cultural geographer interested in literary representations of the city and urban life, the review piqued my interest in *What We All Long For*, particularly since it suggested that the social and the spatial dimensions of urban life are deeply intertwined throughout Brand's novel. It was from this inauspicious starting point that my thesis research developed.

I obtained a copy of *What We All Long For* shortly after reading the review and was immediately struck by several aspects of the novel. To begin with, Brand represents

Toronto as a quintessentially multicultural city¹ characterized by the juxtaposition and intersection of multiple ethnic, racial and national groups. In my experience, and as a number of reviewers have pointed out, this distinguishes *What We All Long For* from a number of other novels set in Toronto that focus on individuals and spaces associated with a single community of immigrants or immigrant origin. Next, I welcomed Brand's choice to centre the novel on the urban lives of individuals born into Toronto's multicultural milieu. More specifically, I was interested in how the experiences, perspectives and social interactions of Brand's second-generation characters inform the production of urban (textual) identities through which they are positioned both individually and collectively within the social world of multicultural Toronto. Finally, as a geographer I was captivated by the central role of urban places and spaces in the constitution and performance of the urban identities in question. In *What We All Long For*, Toronto is not a passive container in which the narrative plays itself out, but rather the city's geographies – social, economic, material – shape the actions, interactions and subjectivities of the central characters.

Based on my initial impressions of Brand's novel, I decided that its original representation of urban life in multicultural Toronto would make an interesting and, more importantly, fruitful object of study for my doctoral thesis. However, it was not

¹ Throughout the thesis, I use the term 'multicultural city' to refer to urban contexts that are defined not only by the co-presence, but also the interaction of multiple cultural groups brought together by global migration. In specific cases, which I have endeavoured to make clear in the text, I also use the term 'multicultural' in relation to the political philosophy of multiculturalism.

until I discovered two other novels, both published within months of *What We All Long For*, that a more concrete vision for the thesis began to develop. I came across *Tourism* (2006) by Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal and *Londonstani* (2006) by Gautam Malkani almost simultaneously since virtually every reference to one seems to make mention of the other. This is undoubtedly because they are both set in contemporary London (UK) and depict the everyday urban lives of second-generation British men of Sikh-Indian background. In addition, both are debut novels by young British-Indian authors (each was in his late 20s at the time of publication) that were heralded as the new darlings of London's vibrant literary scene. Although the characters, plot and narrative style of the two novels are very different indeed, pairing them is justified insofar as both engage the core themes of identity and belonging among second-generation youth of similar backgrounds. Furthermore, in each case (or so it struck me after an initial reading) the inhabitation of everyday urban spaces in London is central to subject formation and social positioning among the main characters in the novels.

With the discovery of *Tourism* and *Londonstani*, I now had three novels published within a year of each other that offer nuanced depictions of the social and spatial lives of urban second-generation characters. From my perspective, the central theme in each novel is the negotiation of identity and concomitant senses of belonging within an urban milieu characterized by multiple cultural influences. In all three cases, places and spaces in the city play a central role in the elaboration of this theme given that they inform the constitution and performance of identity

amongst the various characters. Insofar as one novel is set in Toronto and the other two are set in London, the urban context differs among the novels. However, without seeking to minimize the many differences between Toronto and London, both cities are known, nationally and globally, as centres of immigration and cultural diversity. They are both quintessentially multicultural cities that act as focal points for cultural difference and debates that shape thought and action regarding ethnic, racial and religious pluralism. As such, they offer analogous social contexts for a literary exploration of second-generation urban lives, a claim borne out by the emphasis that all three novels place on cultural diversity in their respective representations of Toronto and London.

Admittedly, three novels could be considered a rather small corpus with which to work. Why not add other novels to the mix that depict similar subjects and explore the same broader theme? To begin with, I found it difficult to identify other contemporary novels about the second generation that were in tune with these three in terms of their focus on everyday urban lives, activation of place and space, embeddedness in contexts of cultural diversity, and overall flavour of the narrative. This is not to say that *What We All Long For*, *Tourism* and *Londonstani* are very similar with respect to the treatment of their shared subject matter, but rather that the overall 'ingredients' of the text are similar. More importantly my decision to focus on these three novels stems largely from the richness of their content and the degree to which they foster – demand even – a nuanced analysis of how they represent second generations in the city. This level of analysis allows for a close

assessment of how their representations of urban life in Toronto and London respond to broader discourses concerning cultural pluralism in Canada and the UK. In essence, I argue that these novels warrant a sustained and contextualized dialogue that would not be possible with a larger corpus. Finally, I maintain that these novels deserve a close reading, in part due to their widespread popularity and the attention they received in the popular media. As a result of their profile, they have the potential to shape conceptions and debates about second-generation identities in the contemporary multicultural city. For this reason alone it would seem warranted to investigate the representations they are circulating.

As the narrative above has tried to capture, to a large extent the content of the novels themselves determined the broader topical and thematic parameters of my thesis research. Indeed, as I elaborate further in Chapter Two, I have attempted to foster a generative, open-ended dialogue with the novels that is sensitive to the tremendous potential they offer for scholarly analysis. This dialogue, guided inevitably by my interests and training as a geographer as well as contemporary scholarship in social and cultural geography, resulted in the more refined research focus and set of objectives outlined below.

Overview

The central concern of my research is the spatial politics of identity associated with the various second-generation characters in the novels introduced above. In other

words, I intend to focus on the 'molecular politics', to use a term preferred by Amin and Thrift (2004, p. 234), that emerge from the textual relationships established between everyday spaces and identity formation amongst the principal characters. An emphasis on molecular politics implies that social positioning in the city is constituted as much through everyday inhabitations of space and processes of subject formation as it is through participation in more conventional politics or economic life (Amin & Thrift, 2004). Indeed, the molecular politics of everyday life in the city give rise to what a number of scholars have termed informal urban citizenship (Secor, 2004; Staeheli, 2003; Isin, 2002a; Isin & Siemiatycki, 2002). This can be defined as the dynamic and contingent outcome of socio-spatial practices and processes – shaped by a variety of structures and agencies² – that define terms of inclusion and exclusion in relation to a broader urban public. This being the case, my ultimate objective is to discuss how the spatial production and performance of identity in the various novels shapes their representation of informal urban citizenship among second generations in the multicultural city. I am interested in drawing out the inherently spatial images and imaginings of informal urban citizenship in Toronto and London generated and circulated in these novels.

My focus on the relationship between city spaces, identity formation and the representation of informal urban citizenship in the novels is underscored by the

² In this context, I use structure as a blanket term to cover spatial configurations, relations of power, economic processes, and discursive formations that condition and shape individual actions and trajectories. Agency refers to the various ways in which structures are interpreted, responded to, and resisted by individual actors whose actions have the potential to shape alternate outcomes.

broadly post-structural notion that representations (literary and otherwise) contribute to the very constitution of society and space. That is to say, representations play a part in defining thought and action in relation to their referents (Strohmayer, 2005; Dixon & Jones III, 2004). It follows that I am interested in the sociological and geographical imaginary of informal urban citizenship produced in the novels under consideration. I maintain that these widely read novels have the potential to inform the way in which academics and the reading public at large understand, conceptualize and relate to second-generation identities and the politics thereof. In order to further this contention, I will contextualize my analysis of the novels by considering how their representations of informal urban citizenship among second generations can be productively drawn into broader debates (at once scholarly and popular) on cultural pluralism and difference in Canada and the UK respectively. Indeed, I intend to show how the novels do not simply reproduce aspects of current debates on the politics of identity and difference, but instead constitute valuable interventions that can shape their future direction in a variety of ways. In all three novels the politics of identity may be grounded in the spaces of everyday urban life, but their meaning and relevance extends beyond the urban level into the contested terrain of ethnic and racial pluralism at the national level.

Given the above, this thesis contributes to a large body of scholarship on the politics of cultural pluralism in Canada and the UK that will be reviewed and discussed at the time of contextualizing my analysis of the novels (see Chapters Four, Seven and Conclusion). In addition, by studying the representation of informal urban

citizenship in literary sources, the thesis makes a reciprocal contribution to a body of interdisciplinary research on informal urban citizenship and to the sub-field of literary geography. To the former, its contribution consists of showing how literature and other forms of representation play a central role in constituting and circulating the politics of informal urban citizenship. To the latter, it adds a new thematic and theoretical dimension to recent writing on the spatial politics of identity in literature by considering the case of the second generation with reference to the concept of informal urban citizenship (see Chapters One and Two for a more thorough outline of these contributions). Finally, the thesis also contributes to research on the spatiality of identity in relation to second generations as well as more broad-based scholarship on the production of identity in urban contexts that gather and temporarily halt flows of culture in a globalizing world (see Conclusion).

The field of literary geography and the notion of informal urban citizenship, as well as how the two intersect within a post-structural theory of representation, will be discussed in the following chapters. Prior to moving on to this, it is warranted to say a few words about how I envision two other concepts that are central to the thesis as outlined above: space and identity. Given that both of these concepts are extraordinarily complex and resist any sort of neat definition, I will simply highlight particular aspects of each that inform my research.

In keeping with the dominant perspective adopted by contemporary theorists, I do not conceptualize space (and urban space in particular) as a static, bounded

'container' in which social life plays out over time, but rather a dynamic, open configuration that is best understood as wholly relational (Gregory, 2009a; Kuhlke, 2006; Isin, 2006; Massey, 2005; Faist, 2004). In my understanding, a relational conception implies two closely linked propositions. First, and most generally, it holds that space and society are essentially co-produced on a constant basis. Second, and more specifically, it maintains that the two are reciprocally constituted by relations engendered through intersecting flows and trajectories – economic, cultural, natural and otherwise (Massey, 2005). In other words, space, as a dynamic, open configuration of intersecting elements fosters social relations and arrangements which themselves inform the production of space as a context wherein social action is variously enabled and constrained. Space is thus the outcome of, and generative context for, all things social. The reciprocal production of space and society can be linked to everything from the organization of labour within a capitalist economy (Harvey, 1989) to the everyday interactions of individuals and groups (Amin & Thrift, 2002a). Representation comes into the fold insofar as processes of imaginative signification sit astride material and embodied processes when it comes to informing the (contingent and mutable) socio-spatial contexts of everyday life (Gregory, 2009a; Hubbard, 2005; Soja, 1996).³ Thus, for my purposes, the spatial embeddedness of the characters and action in the novels profoundly shapes their social being, while also factoring into the constitution of Toronto and London as textual subjects. This merits attention insofar as the

³ I expand on this proposition further in Chapter Two when I discuss a post-structural conception of representation.

representations generated can be deemed relevant to the production of social and spatial life beyond the pages of each novel.

A relational conception of space dovetails well with current theorizations of identity as a dynamic, constantly evolving formation that is constituted in relation to specific contexts and ancillary identities (Duncan, 2009; Martin, 2005; Longhurst, 2003).⁴ In fact, one might say that identities are a by-product of the relations that shape society and space (Anderson, 2008). Two specific aspects of identity are particularly relevant to the research in this thesis. First, identities are shaped through interaction and exchange with other identities, causing them to change and evolve over time.⁵ From this perspective, 'hybridity', to use a term that is commonly deployed, is a condition of identity, even though it may be more immediately evident in 'new' identities that reflect their multiple origins and influences most clearly (a point elaborated in the work of Stuart Hall, 1991). Thus, hybridity should not be "hyped" (see Mitchell, 1997) as a progressive feature of certain identities, but rather its manifestations and politics must be understood contextually and in relation to prevailing social conditions and discourses (which is precisely what I intend to do in this thesis). Second, identities are constituted in part through the way they are

⁴ This is not to overlook the fact that identities are frequently essentialized and constructed as monolithic artefacts that are inherent to individuals and groups. This can service either a politics of exclusion based on conceptions of fundamental difference or a politics of assertion that mobilizes perceptions of innate sameness amongst members of a group.

⁵ This is so even if we consider that identities are often defined based on their difference from 'Other' identities. After all, as a process of relational identity formation, the interaction between identities is still generative in such cases.

performed within particular socio-spatial contexts. An emphasis on performance, posits identity as the contingent outcome of spatially embedded practices of subject formation that are informed by structures of power and the agency with which individuals and groups respond to them (Martin, 2005; Longhurst, 2003). Indeed, performance is a useful term insofar as it implies a practice that is shaped by a set of rules, boundaries and conventions (those set by discourse in this case) as well as the creative ways in which these are challenged (through manifestations of agency) to create meaningful new forms. Both of these aspects of identity come to the fore in the thesis insofar as the identity politics associated with the second-generation characters in the novels are linked to the performance of open and fluid identities in everyday urban spaces.

Two forms of identity, race and ethnicity, surface repeatedly in my discussion of the second-generation characters in the novels. As a general standpoint, I recognize, in line with others, that both race and ethnicity are social and political constructs that are characterized by internal heterogeneity and whose meanings and expressions are mutable over time and space. They are the contingent outcome of trajectories that can be traced to reveal their embeddedness in situated power relations (Hiebert, 2009; Alleyne, 2006; Gilmartin, 2006a, 2006b; Juteau, 2006; Barker, 2004; Kobayashi, 2004; Bonnett & Nayak, 2003). However, the degree to which they have been historically reified and essentialized by a variety of forces and interests as forms of deeply rooted difference grounded in biology (race) or culture (ethnicity) means that they cannot be simply dismissed as powerful fictions. They cannot be

easily dislodged from the central role they occupy as normative categories of social and political organization, even if, by many accounts, they ought not to be afforded the significance they perhaps have been (Gilroy, 2005a; Hall, 2000). In other words, the normative influence of race and ethnicity does not disappear even though it can be convincingly argued that they are open and mutable formations. Indeed, ethnic and racial identities feature in my discussion of the novels largely as forms of essentialized belonging, in relation to which second-generation characters must necessarily negotiate identity in the city. In all cases, the outcome of these negotiations is central to the representation of informal urban citizenship.

Outline

The thesis is divided into three sections, each of which is further subdivided into constituent chapters. The opening section deals with the intersection between the geographical study of literary sources and the concept of informal urban citizenship. The first of the two chapters begins with a review of the subfield of literary geography, with particular focus on scholarship about representations of the city. It then proceeds to discuss the concept of informal urban citizenship on the premise that it can add a new theoretical dimension to current literary geographies of the city. The second chapter starts by theorizing how the analysis of literary representations can also make a reciprocal contribution to the study of informal urban citizenship. This segue ways into a broader discussion of literature as an object of study, which concludes with a reflection on my position as an analyst. The

very end of this chapter rounds off the section with an identification of the specific questions I will ask of the novels during my analysis.

The second section of the thesis focuses entirely on Dionne Brand's novel *What We All Long For*. The two chapters that comprise this section are preceded by a short introduction that provides an overview of the novel and an outline of how my analysis will proceed. The first chapter then undertakes a close reading of the relationships between the inhabitation of urban space, the production of identity, and informal urban citizenship among the novel's main characters. Here I argue that the spatial negotiation of a fluid identity that is not based on rigid forms of ethnic and racial belonging allows Brand's second-generation characters to claim informal urban citizenship in Toronto by resisting forms of socio-spatial marginalization that have shaped the urban lives of their parents. The second chapter starts by considering how the novel encourages its readership to apprehend its representation of informal urban citizenship amongst the second generation in relation to a broader politics of cultural pluralism and difference in Toronto and Canada more generally. This leads to a discussion of how the novel, as interpreted by my analysis, responds and indeed contributes to debates about multiculturalism as a discourse that frames cultural pluralism in Canadian cities.

The third section of the thesis, composed of an introduction and three chapters, is dedicated to discussing the spatial identity politics of informal urban citizenship in relation to *Tourism* and *Londonstani*. The introduction to this section lays out the

broader argument that I will be pursuing in my reading of the novels. In general terms, this argument maintains that among the second-generation characters in both novels, the spatial negotiation of “Brasian”⁶ identities that are informed by their Indian heritage and the cultural influences of urban Britain leads to fundamentally ambiguous or equivocal forms of informal urban citizenship. On one hand, it allows the characters to exert agency over their terms of membership in the urban public, yet on the other hand it also reveals the limits to belonging in the everyday spaces of multicultural London. The first two chapters advance this argument through a close reading of *Tourism* and *Londonstani*. The third and final chapter considers how the representations of informal urban citizenship discussed in my analysis respond to recent scholarship on the politics of cultural pluralism in Britain. In essence, I argue that these novels encourage the reader to adopt a nuanced and cautious perspective on the political currency of Brasian identities associated with urban Britain when it comes to challenging the boundaries and divisions that many scholars argue inform the British national imaginary.

⁶ “Brasian” (sometimes “Br-asian”) is a term used in some recent scholarship to describe how South Asian and British cultural influences inform the production of identity amongst members of the south Asian diaspora in British cities (see Wetherell, 2008).

SECTION I:
SCHOLARLY CONTEXT AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

CHAPTER 1

Literary geography and urban citizenship: A review

Geography, literature and the city

Although it may still seem a rather unusual and incongruous practice to some, geographers have been studying literature since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. Tentative and sporadic at first, the use of fictive literature as an object of geographical analysis has since become an established feature of cultural geography. Over the past fifty or so years literature has provided geographers of different persuasions textual material for exploring the interests of the day, including regional characteristics, the human experience of place, class inequality, geographical discourse and epistemology, and the spatial politics of identity and culture (Brosseau, 2009). Indeed, judging by the growing volume⁷ and diversity of contributions to the sub-field of 'literary geography', one could argue that literature has become increasingly 'normalized' as a medium through which geographers engage with the core thematic and theoretical concerns of their discipline (Brosseau, 2009). In recent years these concerns have often been explored by analysing literary representations of a common socio-spatial subject: 'the city'.

⁷ A comprehensive database search yields more than 250 research contributions (including peer-reviewed articles, edited collections and monographs) to the sub-field of literary geography, well over 50 of which have been published in the past five years alone.

As a subset of literary geography, literary geographies of the city constitute an established nexus of inquiry within which it is possible to distinguish three principal streams of research based on overriding scholarly objectives and theoretical starting points. The first stream, loosely allied to the broader theoretical dispositions of humanistic geography, approaches literature largely as a record of the human experience of cities and their various spaces. The second stream approaches literature as a source of alternative geographical epistemologies – new ways of knowing and writing the city – that act as a counterpoint to academic scholarship. The third and most recent stream considers the spatial politics of identity surrounding literary representations of cities and everyday urban life. While the proposed research can be seen as drawing from and contributing to this entire spectrum of scholarship (and indeed to the sub-field of literary geography more generally), it takes the third of the three research streams identified as its most self-evident point of departure.

Capturing the urban experience: Humanist readings of the city in literature

The study of literature became widespread in geography during the 1970s and 1980s as humanistic geographers increasingly turned to literature in order to further their interest in the values, perceptions and meanings that arise from the experience of place. Central to humanistic geography's conception of literature is a belief that talented authors have the capacity to capture the essence of fleeting experiences

and, in so doing, to articulate universal truths about the human condition.⁸ Consequently, one could say that humanistic geography tends toward a rather mimetic understanding of literature insofar as the latter is regarded as an accurate transcription of the essential qualities of human experience of place (Brosseau, 1994). In addition, the importance afforded to authorial insight by humanistic geographers has often led to a widespread under-evaluation of the contextual factors that contribute to determining the content of literary texts (Brosseau, 1994). Finally, it has been argued that humanistic geography approaches literature as a largely unproblematic resource that yields information in an almost transparent fashion. In other words, minimal consideration is given to the complex process through which literary expression produces spatial representations (Brosseau, 1995). However, despite their shortcomings, humanistic readings of literature paved the way for contemporary literary geography by establishing novels (and other literary sources) as legitimate objects of geographic inquiry, something for which humanistic geography rarely gets due credit in today's more theoretically minded cultural geography.

Until the late 1980s, humanistic literary geography was characterized by an overwhelming focus on the experience of rural landscapes as depicted in 19th and early 20th century realist novels. In an attempt to move beyond this limited focus, Porteous (1987, 1985) uses literature as a basis from which to consider the urban

⁸ As Sharp (2000) points out, relying on a modernist ideal of universality to justify literature as an object of study is problematic and increasingly untenable in light of postmodern scholarship that highlights the situated quality of all representations.

geographies of modernist alienation, thereby opening the door to further humanist studies on literary representations of urban experience. These began to emerge in the 1990s, ironically at a time when humanistic geography (outside literary geography at least) was being subsumed into a 'new cultural geography' given rise to by the 'cultural turn'. For example, a collection of essays edited by Preston and Simpson-Housley (1994) aims to "concentrate on the city as seen through the eyes of novelists and poets and their characters, in order to offer a particular kind of witness to the challenges, opportunities, stresses and frustrations of city life" (p. 2). Reflecting the humanist perspective, emphasis in this collection is clearly placed on the insights offered by perspicacious authors with correspondingly little attempt made to problematize the process of representation itself. Other studies are equally interested in understanding the city from the viewpoint of an individual novelist or the particular social group for which they are held to speak. By way of example, one can point to a series of studies that consider the distinctive perceptions and experiences of the city as reflected in the writing of women authors (see Gilbert and Simpson-Housley, 1997; Gilbert, 1996; Monk & Norwood, 1990).⁹ More recently, geographers such as Hausladen (2000) have returned to a staple concept of humanistic geography by considering how literary sources capture urban senses of place.

⁹ Insofar as there is a politics inherent to gendered experiences of the city, this work could also be grouped under the third category of research – *Literature, urban space and the cultural politics of identity* – discussed below. However, it has been included here because the work cited is far more weighted toward discussing the urban experiences of women rather than the cultural identity politics these experiences underscore.

Although humanistic literary geographers have not (to my knowledge) considered the representation of urban identity among second generation individuals, they have been the ones who have engaged the most with related themes of migration, diaspora and exile. In keeping with traditional humanist concerns, such studies approach literature as a record of personal insights, perceptions, attitudes, adjustments and aspirations that reveal the urban experiences of migration, diaspora and exile in a variety of cities at different moments in history. For example, a collection of essays edited by King, Connell and White (1995) approaches literature as a source for gaining insight into the “essence of what it is like to be a migrant” (p. 10). Within this collection, one contribution (Duffy, 1995) highlights the variously traumatic and liberating transition from rural to urban life registered in the literature of Irish emigration, while another (Waterman & Schmool, 1995) draws on literature to reveal the process of personal, social and cultural adaptation to urban Britain by Jewish immigrants from the 1800s to the mid-1900s. Another chapter (Hargreaves, 1995), considers the paradoxical perceptions of suburban housing estates and *bidonville* registered in the literature of Algerian immigrants in France (see also White, 1997). While I acknowledge that such scholarship lays the groundwork for geographical research on literary representations of identity in the multicultural city, it is not my intention to adopt a humanist approach to the analysis of the novels under consideration in this thesis. Rather my approach is more in keeping with literary geographies of the city that have emerged in the wake of the ‘cultural turn’ and the resulting reformulation of cultural geography. These literary geographies can be divided into two main streams, to which I now turn my attention.

Literature as a source of alternative geographical epistemologies

The sea-changes experienced in cultural geography during the early 1990s resulted in questions of representation becoming central to the sub-discipline. It was within this intellectual climate that some geographers began to conceptualize literary representations of urban space as a source of geographical epistemologies – alternative ways of conceptualizing and writing the city – that can act as a counterpoint, or at the very least a complement to, scholarly perspectives. From this standpoint, particular consideration is afforded to the textual practices (the use of language, literary devices, narrative form, generic conventions and so forth) through which literary texts generate original geographies of the city rather than simply reflect those circulating in academic scholarship. According to Brosseau's (1995) oft quoted article, approaching literature in this way leads geographers to "experience another way of writing and producing meaning, of interpreting or representing social diversity and contingency in space, which theories and academic discursivity cannot always accommodate" (p. 106). Brosseau's point is exemplified in a reading of the modernist classic *Manhattan Transfer* in which he argues that the novel's representation of New York is embedded in the very fabric of the text, such that the form and content of the novel blend into one another.

In line with Brosseau, Johnson (1999) argues that the narrative style employed in Eoin McNamee's novel *Resurrection Man* generates an original representation of urban violence that operates outside the discursive and methodological limitations

governing academic scholarship, thereby calling into question basic assumptions concerning the sources and motives of sectarian violence in Belfast and elsewhere. Further in keeping with the perspective at hand, Howell (1998) proposes that the particular characteristics and conventions of the police procedural, a sub-genre of crime fiction, engender alternative epistemologies of urban space and urban experience that can be used as a basis for critiquing the epistemological assumptions and discursive strategies that characterize radical geography scholarship on the city.¹⁰ While this scholarship considers how literary representations might inform academic discourse, other scholarship considers how literature offers new ways of conceiving place and space that contribute to the constitution and reconstitution of everyday geographical imaginations of the city. The prime example here would be Kitchin and Kneale (2003, 2001), who argue that science fiction novels constitute cognitive spaces in which possible socio-spatial and socio-technical futures are imagined in ways that shape present-day individual and institutional thought and practice, guiding the development of emerging spaces such as the internet. More specifically, the authors consider how the thematic impulses, narrative styles, aesthetic tendencies, imagery and so forth associated with 'cyberpunk' fiction (a sub-genre of science fiction) generate a post-modern speaking position that conjures up future spatialities free from the rigid binaries of modernist thought.

¹⁰ See also Schmid (1995) and Farish (2005) for further insight into the contribution of urban crime and noir fiction to geographical epistemology.

I find the scholarship reviewed above, and the particular perspective it adopts, both convincing and potentially applicable to the novels that are analyzed in this thesis. In fact, in a co-authored article (Brousseau and Tavares, 2008), I have considered how the narrative strategies employed in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* are particularly adept at capturing the multiplicity of cultural and individual identities, encounters and relationships characteristic of the contemporary multicultural city. The article in question argues that Brand takes on the challenge of capturing, in literary form, the same plural and fragmented socio-spatial urban environments that geographers and other scholars have sought to capture through theory and academic analysis. Having said this, the focus of the research in this thesis is not to consider how the novels under analysis generate alternative epistemologies and representational strategies to those found in academic scholarship. Moreover, my emphasis is less on the formal aspects of literary representation (i.e. the generative role of literary language, narrative and genre) than on the meanings, perspectives, identities and relationships created and circulated by the novels under analysis.¹¹ I do however retain the broader notion that literature plays a key role in shaping the geographical imagination of cities, a point on which I elaborate in the following chapter.

¹¹ This is not, of course, to say that I will not be considering how language, literary devices, narrative form, generic conventions and so forth contribute to the production and dissemination of the meanings that I draw from the text in the process of interpretation.

Literature, urban space and the cultural politics of identity

In addition to a concern with conceptualizing and representing geographies, the rise of a 'new cultural geography' during the 1990s brought with it a focus on the spatial politics of identity. Inspired in part by the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, this focus belies an understanding of culture as deeply embedded in the contested social relations of everyday life from which cultural identities emerge as the dynamic and contingent outcome of the discursive production and reinforcement of social difference (Johnston & Sidaway, 2004; Mitchell, 2000; Cosgrove, 2000; Jackson, 2000a). The construction of identity can be regarded as inherently political because the process of differentiation rarely occurs on purely aesthetic grounds, but rather is deeply implicated in struggles for recognition and status as well as symbolic and social capital, all of which facilitate access to material and territorial resources. Identity can be further considered political, as it is often mobilized by individuals and groups as a form of resistance against constellations of power and hegemony that govern social relations (Pratt, 2000, 1999; Smith, 1999; Fincher & Jacobs, 1998). By locating and spatializing their research, the particular contribution of geographers has been to draw attention to the critical role of concrete spaces and places in the conduct of identity politics (Sharp et al, 2000; Pile & Keith, 1997; Keith & Pile, 1993). It is within this intellectual climate that geographers interested in literary representations of the city have recently begun to use literature as a basis for delving into the relationships between urban space and the cultural politics of

gender, class, race, and sexuality among other categories of identification and marginalization.

Among the first geographical studies to use literature as the basis for elaborating on the relationship between urban space and the cultural politics of identity is McKittrick (2000). McKittrick proposes that in Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, race and gender are simultaneously constituted, naturalized and contested in relation to the segregated spaces of an Ohio steel town, which are characterized by discursively regulated expectations of racialized and gendered behaviour that are interpreted in different ways by Morrison's characters. On his part, Jazeel (2005) considers how a gay youth, the main protagonist of Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy*, subversively negotiates Colombo's everyday spaces of hetero-normative masculinity that discipline the body by prescribing what constitutes normal and respectable sexual desire among the Sri Lankan middle classes. Similar themes pertaining to the role of everyday urban spaces in the regulation of and resistance to racial, gendered, and sexualized norms are further explored in studies by Hughes (1999) and Brosseau and Ayari (2005) on Afro-Caribbean and Tunisian literature respectively. Other studies, focused on the relationship between identity, power and space, have turned to literature in order to further an understanding of the spatial regimes through which forms of totalitarianism (Tyner, 2004) and sectarianism (Stainer, 2006, 2005) are both constructed and subverted. For instance, Stainer (2005) argues that Ciaran Carson's novel *The Star Factory* subverts constructions of place, identity and difference associated with sectarian

nationalism in Belfast through an imaginative reinvention of urban geographical experience that emphasises fluid and hybrid forms of identification, multiple viewpoints, and the transgression of territorial boundaries.

Insofar as it focuses on the spatial identity politics surrounding literary representations of urban life, the research reviewed here forms the most obvious point of departure for my approach to the novels under analysis in this thesis. Having said this, I depart from the existing body of research in two key ways, which allows me to make an original contribution to the body of scholarship reviewed. First, I consider a theme that, despite its contemporary prevalence, has not been explored in literary geography – the spatial identity politics of everyday life in the multicultural city. Second, I frame my study in relation to the concept of ‘informal urban citizenship’, which I believe offers literary geographers an unexploited theoretical framework for considering how literary representations are implicated in the ongoing constitution of social relations in the city. However, before I say more about urban citizenship, let us consider the first, thematic, contribution identified.

Above and beyond the humanistic studies referred to earlier, literary geographers have not explored the representation of life in the contemporary multicultural city, let alone focused specifically on the case of second generations. That being said, several articles have considered the cultural politics of postcolonial migration as represented in literature. Broadly speaking this work has argued that immigrant and second-generation writers from former colonies generate hybrid speaking positions

that undermine rigid imperatives of national identity and colonial discourse. For example, Sharp (1996, 1994) argues that Salman Rushdie's famous novel *The Satanic Verses* constitutes an articulation of the marginal, fragmented, and ambivalent subjectivities that are formed in relation to the heterotopic realities and de-territorialized flows characteristic of the postcolonial age. According to Sharp (1996), Rushdie's representation of contemporary cultural hybridity produces an alternative conceptualization of identity that privileges intercultural exchange over "a territorial geography of us-them alterity" (p. 126). Similarly, Jazeel (2003) proposes that Romesh Gunsekera's novel *Reef* generates imaginative geographies of Sri Lanka that reflect the hybrid speaking position and diasporic consciousness of an author whose modulations of memory are heavily influenced by the experience of migration. Perhaps more so than the others, Bald (1995) embeds his literary analysis of postcolonial identity politics in an urban context. Yet in keeping with Sharp and Jazeel, the role of urban space in the constitution, negotiation and articulation of these discourses remains largely undeveloped.

These studies draw on literature to make a potentially valuable contribution to our understanding of emerging identity formations in a global context marked by mass migration. However, the postcolonial perspective they adopt tends to devalue the importance of specific places and spaces in the constitution and negotiation of identity. It does so by reinforcing a scholarly discourse in which contemporary global migration is conflated with abstract notions of geographical displacement and the transgressive potential of deterritorialized flows (Conradson & Latham, 2005;

Cresswell, 2002, 2001). Moreover, focusing on the inherently subversive quality of hybrid identities tends to overlook the fact that migrant subjects are still classed, raced and gendered bodies in motion within specific historical contexts, political formations and spaces (Smith, 2005; see also K. Mitchell, 2005).¹² Outside the subfield of literary geography, these and other critiques of postcolonial discourse have led to a growing number of calls for studies that are attentive to everyday practices and geographical emplacement in the study of society, culture and identity within the broader context of contemporary global migration (see Conradson & Latham, 2005). By adopting an optic of emplaced practice – one that insists on the “symbiosis of locatedness and motion rather than the [epistemological] valorization of one over the other” (Cresswell, 2002, p. 26) – this research focuses on the formative role of place and locality in the constitution and performance of contemporary migrant subjectivities. In so doing, it attempts to destabilize the ontological binaries between local and global, place and mobility, often associated with postcolonial discourse, suggesting instead that the former mediate the latter by functioning as ‘contact zones’ wherein disparate cultural flows are grounded and negotiated by embodied individuals during the operations of everyday life (Yeoh and

¹² Indeed, as Pratt (1999) points out, the valorization of hybrid identities over others based on their supposedly critical or emancipatory potential is problematic given that the category ‘hybrid’ naturalizes the socially constructed identity formations (based on race, ethnicity, nationality, class and gender) against which it defines itself. Instead, she contends, the goal of the critic should be to create trouble by making visible boundary construction and the production of difference, and by keeping alive the question of who, inevitably, is being excluded and who is benefiting as identities are defined and redefined. Marking boundaries, insisting on the materiality and persistence of differences, may be as politically productive as blurring them with notions of hybridity.

Willis, 2005; see also Rogers, 2005; Ley, 2004; Ley & Waters, 2004; Jackson, Crang & Dwyer, 2004; Amin & Thrift, 2002a, 2002b; Massey, 1994).¹³

In line with this perspective, Amin (2004) conceptualizes 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” (p. 38).

As such, cities give rise to what he refers to as a ‘politics of propinquity’:

The politics of propinquity, then, may be read as a politics of negotiating the immanent effects of geographical juxtaposition between physical spaces, overlapping communities, contrasting cultural practices. (Amin, 2004, p. 39)

Commenting on Amin’s theorization, Massey (2004) explains the ‘politics of propinquity’ as the product “of negotiating across and among difference the implacable spatial fact of shared turf” (p. 6). Indeed, going one step further, Massey (2005) proposes that the condition of “multiplicity” – which arguably reaches its most complex expression in cities – is an inherent property of space, one that breeds an open-ended politics rooted in the complex, contingent relations that necessarily arise between heterogeneous entities. For Amin, this politics of propinquity is constituted in large part through the social encounter of cultural and other forms of

¹³ By way of example, one might point to Smith’s notion of transnational urbanism, which draws attention to the (social and spatial) emplacement of mobile subjects in order to guard against the macro-analytic view of mobility as occurring in a hyper mobile “space of flows” (Smith, 2005; see also Ley, 2004). One might also point to feminist perspectives that seek to inject the concrete specificity of daily experience into debates on contemporary migration (see Pratt & Yeoh, 2003 for an overview).

difference in the spaces of everyday life, such as schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods and public spaces of all kinds (Amin, 2002; Amin & Thrift, 2002a). Put differently, the spatial negotiation of difference in contemporary cities underpins the relational politics identified by Amin (2004) and Massey (2005, 2004).¹⁴

In keeping with the above, my reading of the novels under analysis focuses on the role of urban spaces in the textual constitution and performance of identity among the second-generation protagonists. I am particularly interested in the way literature mobilizes urban space to generate politicized identities in contexts marked precisely by the juxtaposition and intersection of multiple cultural groups. More specifically, I will discuss how representations of the everyday practice and inhabitation of urban space are implicated in the textual production of urban identities through which individual characters, and the groups to which they belong, distinguish and position themselves socially within an ethnically and racially plural urban milieu. In doing so, I wish to relate the spatial identity politics under analysis to the broader notion of informal urban citizenship. This brings me to the second contribution of my thesis relative to literary geographies of the city. I argue that the concept of informal urban citizenship offers a useful framework for considering the (necessarily provisional) outcomes and implications of the spatial politics with which I and other literary geographers are concerned. Indeed, mobilizing the concept of informal urban

¹⁴ Amin (2004) identifies a corollary 'politics of connectivity', which is intended to capture the politics linked to trans-urban linkages in terms of economy, labour, consumption, culture, knowledge and so forth. While Amin's 'politics of connectivity' would be useful if the thesis were emphasizing, for instance, the transnational geographies and affiliations of the second-generation characters in my novels, in the present case my focus will rest by and large on Amin's 'politics of propinquity'.

citizenship adds a new theoretical dimension to the scholarship that acts as a starting point for my research. At the same time, exploring questions of informal urban citizenship through a geographical reading of novels also contributes to a growing body of scholarship on informal urban citizenship by considering how literary representations shape conceptions of social relations in the city. This is something I will take up in Chapter Two, following the next subsection that reviews current research on informal urban citizenship from a geographical perspective.

Formal and informal urban citizenship

Unlike the Greeks we are not citizens of cities, but rather nations. In this context the concept urban citizenship refers to the negotiation of national citizenship in the everyday spaces of the city. After all, we inhabit the city, not the nation. In recent years there has been a growing volume of research in geography and related disciplines on the socio-cultural – or ‘informal’ – dimensions of urban citizenship. This research is premised on the notion that, as a concept, urban citizenship concerns more than the contestation and interpretation of legal rights at the urban level. In other words, it is not limited to the formal relationship between individuals and the state as grounded in urban life or indeed to formal membership in an urban polity (Isin, 2002a, 2000). Rather, the concept also pertains to social positioning within a broader urban (and by extension national) public as determined by a wide ranging set of socio-cultural practices and processes. Informal urban citizenship is constituted in part as individuals and the social groups to which they belong

negotiate their terms of membership within an imagined public and seek to exert agency over their participation in urban life. Ultimately, informal urban citizenship has to do with social and symbolic capital, recognition, influence and the ways in which these are variously acquired, interpreted, negotiated, contested, and, indeed, denied within a variety of urban contexts (Secor, 2004, 2003; Staeheli, 2003; Sandercock, 2003; Isin & Sieniatycki, 2002; Isin, 2002b, 2000; Holston and Appadurai, 1999; Isin & Wood, 1999).

Many scholars think of urban citizenship as being constituted through the act of claiming what Lefebvre referred to as the 'right to the city' (Secor, 2003; Gilbert & Phillips, 2003; D. Mitchell, 2003; Staeheli & Dowler, 2002; Isin, 2002a, 2000; Isin & Wood, 1999). As a concept, 'the right to the city' is clearly distinct from the notion of 'rights' in the legal sense of the term. It implies more than access to existing entitlements or spaces, or to the unhindered accumulation of capital in a free market economy (Harvey, 2007). 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, p. 174 in D. Mitchell, 2003). It is the right to 'presence', to difference and to different modes of living. According to Lefebvre, it implies the ability to participate in the creation of the city as an *oeuvre*, a collective 'work' produced by the actions and interactions of individuals and the social groups to which they belong (D. Mitchell, 2003). Seen in this way, 'the right to the city' is the right to contribute to the definition of the city as a social space. For this to occur, Lefebvre (1996) maintains a need for "...city dwellers, and of the groups they (on

the basis of social relations) constitute, to appear on all networks and circuits of communication, information and exchange” (p. 194-5 in McCann, 2003) such that they might resist the expropriation of the oeuvre – of the city as a product of cohabiting difference – by dominant classes, ideologies or economic interests (D. Mitchell, 2003). Indeed, “the right to the city legitimizes the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 195).

Given the above, one might say that the concept of urban citizenship – and indeed citizenship more broadly – can be usefully thought of as having two interrelated dimensions that can be considered at once mutually constitutive and semi-autonomous (Kurtz & Hankins, 2005; Dickinsen et al, 2005; Painter & Philo, 1995). The first is often dubbed ‘formal’ as it refers to status and rights under the law as grounded in everyday urban life. In other words, formal urban citizenship – at least from a geographical perspective – refers to practices of space that can be more or less directly associated with claims for rights. These practices are either consciously aimed at claiming rights, or they are mobilized in claims for rights. The second dimension is variously termed ‘informal’, ‘socio-cultural’ or ‘substantive’, operating as it does in the domain of socio-cultural identities and practices. Informal urban citizenship refers to spatial practices of identity that inform positioning with a broader urban public and by extension the imagined community of the nation. These are practices through which we engage with discourses of national identity and belonging.

The formal and informal dimensions of urban citizenship are of course linked. Claiming rights in urban space is a way of engaging or challenging national discourses and imaginaries. Conversely, spatial practices of identity contribute to social positioning, which has a bearing on the negotiation of rights. Indeed, spatial identity politics are a means through which “individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand or maintain existing rights” (Isin & Wood, 1999, p. 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; Holston & Appadurai, 1999). It can also be seen as the starting point for contesting established conceptions of citizenship and the normative discourses (such as multiculturalism or neo-liberalism) that inform them:

With their concentrations of the non-local, the strange, the mixed, and the public, cities engage most palpably the tumult of citizenship. Their crowds catalyze processes that decisively expand and erode the rules, meanings and practices of citizenship. Their streets conflate identities of territory and contract with those of race, religion, class, culture, and gender to produce the reactive ingredients of both progressive and reactionary political movements. (Holston & Appadurai, 1999, p. 2)

Cities, then, constitute important sites where citizenship, as both a bundle of rights and narrative of belonging, is constituted and negotiated.

Having said this, in keeping with Painter and Philo (1995), I would “insist that more informal designations of citizenship [in this case urban citizenship] retain a dynamic of their own which demands explicit consideration” (p. 115). Otherwise one risks approaching a wide ranging set of social-cultural interactions, negotiations and

conflicts as a series of goal-oriented attempts to obtain legal rights or challenge the hegemony of dominant groups, as opposed to an ongoing process of acquiring social recognition, influence and positioning that may eventually lead to expanded legal rights or a more central role in the normative order of a city. Thus, discussions of informal urban citizenship need not revolve around how spatial practices of identity shape claims to legal rights for particular groups.¹⁵ Instead, consideration is given to how the interplay between space and identity shapes the far less concrete, but no less meaningful, 'right to the city' with all that the term implies. Informal urban citizenship understood as the 'right to the city' is at least three things. First, it is an end point in itself; a way of conceptualizing the political outcome or significance of identities constituted through everyday urban spaces. Second, it is a starting point for considering how spatial practices of identity in the city reproduce or challenge broader narratives and imaginaries of national identity, belonging and inclusion. Third, it is a significant yet very intangible factor at play in the determination of legal rights. Indeed, the precise nature of the link between the two is often elusive, making concrete connections often forced and reductionist, which explains why I will not attempt to do so in the thesis. Ultimately, in terms of my literary analysis, the notion of informal urban citizenship offers me both a way of framing the spatial identity practices of the characters and a means of connecting the novels' representations to broader discourses and debates. That is its function.

¹⁵ I would argue that from a cultural geography perspective the impulse to relate discussions of informal urban citizenship back to legal rights is far less prevalent than in social and political geography.

Identity, space and urban citizenship

It is widely held that the politicization of identity plays a central role in what Holston and Appadurai (1999) refer to as “the public calculus of citizenship” (p. 8). Identity formation is central to urban citizenship because it is through the production and performance of urban identities that social positioning is achieved and the discourses that inform social relations are encountered and engaged (Secor, 2004, 2003; Holston & Appadurai, 1999). As Isin (2002b) notes:

The city is a difference machine insofar as it is understood as that configuration that is constituted by the dialogical encounter of groups formed and generated immanently in the process of taking up positions, orienting themselves for and against each other, inventing and assembling strategies and technologies, mobilizing various forms of capital and making claims to that space that is objectified as “the city”. Neither groups nor their identities exist before the encounter with the city. [...] Nor does the city exist in a predefined shape or form as unity. The city is neither a background to these struggles, against which groups wager, nor is it a foreground for which groups struggle for domination. The city is the battleground through which groups define their identities, stake their claims, wage their battles, and articulate citizenship rights and obligations. [...] The city as a difference machine relentlessly provokes, differentiates, positions, mobilizes, immobilizes, oppresses, liberates. Being political arises qua the city and there is no political being outside the machine. (p. 49-50)

While Isin’s passage emphasizes conflict over more prosaic negotiation, it clearly conveys the notion that cities, as sites of heterogeneity, generate and mobilize differences based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, class, gender or sexuality (amongst other criteria of identification) as the basis for formal and

informal politics of urban life (Amin, 2006; Holston & Appadurai, 1999).¹⁶ This is particularly so in the contemporary multicultural city where the politicization of existing identities and the articulation of new identities becomes a central part of daily life, as migrants and their offspring define conditions of belonging in a new society, disrupting in the process taken-for-granted categories of social life and reshaping the 'public' in cities the world over (Sandercock, 2003). Yet, identity, it cannot be forgotten, can also be the basis for exclusion and marginalization from the social, economic and political circuits of the city. Indeed, identity can be seen as politicized not only because it constitutes a basis for contesting informal urban citizenship, but also because it constitutes the basis upon which informal urban citizenship is denied or deferred.

Above and beyond being a relational phenomenon, constituted and politicized in large part through the dialogical encounter with difference, identity is also a practiced phenomenon. That is to say, identity is formulated and reformulated in part through its continual performance or enactment, which is necessarily contextualized and inevitably spatial. Geographers and others sensitive to the role of place and space have been quick to point out that urban space and the geography of the city play a key role in the identity politics through which informal

¹⁶ As the passage further evokes, the politicization of social identities is very much part of their constitution and transformation. This is in large part because social identities are relational constructs that are shaped by social interactions, relations and engagements. Consequently, identities – racial, ethnic, gendered or otherwise – are not innate, but rather dynamic, socio-historically contingent, cultural phenomena that are open to different individual and group interpretations at different times and places.

urban citizenship is constituted (Amin, 2006; Staeheli, 2003; Sandercock, 2003; Isin 2002b; Da Costa Gomes, 2001; Isin & Wood, 1999; see also case studies referenced below). Thus, it is through space that urban citizenship itself is contested and transformed on an ongoing basis. Once again, according to Isin (2002b):

Space, 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.¹⁷ 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. (p. 49; see also Isin & Wood, 1999, p. 24; Keith & Pile, 1993)

As Lefebvre himself argued, the continual activation, appropriation and creation of space in the city is the key means through which the 'right to the city' is claimed and membership in urban public is contested (D. Mitchell, 2003; Isin, 2000). Once again, however, it is important to foreground the potential role of urban spaces and the experience thereof in processes that deny individuals and groups 'the right to the city'. Like identity, space must be regarded as a political entity, not only as a site of emancipatory potential, but also a site through which marginalization is created and perpetuated within the urban social sphere.

¹⁷ Indeed, as Isin (2002b) notes earlier in the same volume, "groups cannot materialize themselves as real without realizing themselves in space" (p. 42-43).

In recent years there has been a growing volume of geographical research that seeks to elaborate on the relationship between identity, urban space and informal urban citizenship in the context of contemporary multicultural cities. This research, often in the form of case-studies, has considered how a variety of activations and appropriations of urban space are central to the identity politics through which informal urban citizenship is contested and practiced by groups of recent migrant origin (i.e. Turkish-Germans or Torontonians Latin Americans). Even so, the case-studies in question constitute an important point of departure for my thesis since they consider the same sets of relationships – between identity, urban space and informal citizenship – that I intend to explore in the representation of second generation individuals in multicultural Toronto and London.

Several sets of case-studies can be discerned. A first set of case-studies has focused specifically on the mobilization of public space in the form of parades, celebrations and political demonstrations. For example, Veronis (2006) considers how the Canadian Hispanic Day Parade (CHDP) is a means through which Toronto's Latin Americans contest 'suburban citizenship' by engaging in a visible act of self-representation that counters their social and spatial marginalization in the city. Her study argues that the CHDP can be seen as a complex practice of belonging and inclusion within a broader urban and national context marked by official multiculturalism and neo-liberal ideologies. Similar mobilizations of public space and the identity politics underlying them are focal points of Jackson's (1992) study on Toronto's Caribana Festival and Valentine's (2000) reading of London's

Notting Hill Festival. Also relevant here is Ehrkähmp and Leitner's (2003) analysis of the relationship between demonstrations by Turkish-Kurd immigrants and claims to citizenship in German cities.

A second set of case-studies is more concerned with the ways groups of recent migrant origin spatialize identity and claim informal urban citizenship through the material appropriation and transformation of urban spaces. A good example of this is Isin and Siemiatycki's (2002) discussion of the contestations and controversies surrounding attempts by Muslim immigrant communities to obtain planning permission for the establishment of mosques in the Greater Toronto Area. By struggling to claim space for mosques in the face of resistance from city officials and segments of the public at large, the authors argue that Muslim groups resist their collective exclusion and marginalization from the social, cultural and political spheres of the city. The establishment of mosques is presented as a means of claiming symbolic and physical presence in the city; of imprinting an identity on the urban landscape in material form that is "crucial to helping Muslims constitute themselves as social groups and make themselves present in civic and political space" (Isin & Siemiatycki, 2002, p. 195). Other case-studies of a similar persuasion have considered the imbrications between claims to informal urban citizenship among migrant communities and such material transformations of the urban environment as the creation of ethnic neighbourhoods (Veronis, 2007; Ehrkähmp, 2005) and, rather more modestly, the establishment of community gardens that allow for the achievement of food security (Baker, 2004).

A third and final strand of research, centering on the work of Anna Secor, is more concerned with creation of politicized identity formations during the everyday practise of urban space in the multicultural city, a perspective I wish to adopt in my own research. In two articles, Secor (2004, 2003) considers how urban citizenship, which she defines as “a set of relationships between the individual and the city that takes shape through processes of identity-formation, social positioning in relation to the urban community, and claims to urban rights” (2003, p. 155), is negotiated in the everyday lives and spatial practices of Kurdish migrants in the Turkish capital of Istanbul. These practices are described as a means through which the Kurdish women in question engage “dominant understandings of urban identity, community and citizenship in Istanbul today” (Secor 2003, p. 165). Indeed, part of the strength of Secor’s work lies in her sensitivity to the way discursive framings of identity and citizenship in contemporary Turkey – and the logic of alterity upon which these are based – are at once imposed upon and resisted by Kurdish migrant women through the urban spaces of everyday life such as schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, city streets and parks. It is precisely this perspective that I wish to adopt in my own work, one that is sensitive to ways in which the ‘right to the city’ – with all it implies – can be both denied and claimed in the act of engaging broader discursive formations during what Secor (2004) refers to suggestively as the “everyday spatial tracings of urban life” (p. 365). Such a perspective is also in line with Dickinsen et al (2005), who call for a focus on everyday spatial practices and encounters in geographical approaches to citizenship. They point out how the spaces of everyday life lie at the intersection between regulatory structures and individual agency, which

makes them privileged sites for performing and contesting the boundaries and discourses of citizenship (see also Amin, 2002a; Amin & Thrift, 2002a).

The discussion above revolves around the notion of informal urban citizenship, which can be described less as an acquired status than a socio-cultural process through which urbanites and the social groups to which they belong contest, with varying degrees of success, what Lefebvre referred to as the 'right to the city'. Spatial identity politics have been offered as a key means through which 'presence' in the city is claimed and groups seek to instantiate themselves in the urban public. However, identity and space – and the everyday experience thereof – can also be seen as vehicles through which urban citizenship or the 'right to the city' are deferred or denied by structural forces that condition inclusion and participation in a city's economic and social spheres. Drawing on the work of Vivien Lowndes (1995), Secor (2003) points out that "any interrogation of urban citizenship 'needs to take into account that for many the city is experienced in terms of exclusion and marginality, rather than membership and identification,' (Lowndes, 1995, p. 164, in Secor, 2003, p. 165)". That is to say that it is important to think of informal urban citizenship as a dynamic and contested process that often straddles a nebulous boundary between social inclusion and marginalization. Indeed, the very fact that the socio-cultural practices of particular social groups can be regarded as practices of informal urban citizenship, implies that they are in a disadvantaged position relative to dominant social groups for whom the 'right to the city' is largely a foregone affair. Consequently, research such as my own must take into account the

incomplete nature of claims to informal urban citizenship and consider how they are often framed by experiences of social exclusion and marginalization.

The working conceptualization of informal urban citizenship offered above informs my reading of the novels under analysis in the thesis. As already noted, I propose that framing my study on the representation of spatial identity politics associated with second-generation youth in terms of informal urban citizenship adds a new dimension to existing literary geographies of the city. It does so by offering a theoretical perspective that encourages us to consider how literature is implicated in the processes through which social positioning in the multicultural city is conceptualized and communicated. At the same time, my literary analysis also makes a substantive contribution to the existing geographical research on informal urban citizenship reviewed above, in this case by foregrounding the role of literary representation in shaping the geographical imaginary of informal urban citizenship amongst second generations, both generally and in relation to specific urban contexts. In the following chapter, I expand this reciprocal contribution by theorizing the relationship between literary representation and informal urban citizenship. Having done so, I go on to discuss how I conceptualize literature as an object of analysis within the purview of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

Constituting the geographical imagination: An approach to the analysis of literary representations

Literature, representation and informal urban citizenship: A post-structural perspective

The growing influence of post-structuralism in human geography has made it largely untenable for contemporary geographers to approach literary sources as mimetic reflections of a pre-signified geographical 'reality' that exists autonomously from the pages of a given novel.¹⁸ In other words, literature does not mirror a 'real-world'

¹⁸ Post-structuralism has its foundations in the structural linguistics of Saussure, which denies any fixed relationship between signifier (language in the case of literature) and signified (the geographical world in this case), suggesting instead that language produces meaning according to structural rules that govern a fully relational system of understanding in which the meaning of a signifier is derived from its difference from and relation to other signifiers (rather than a direct association with its referent whose cognition is only possible within the conceptual categories that language allows). From here we derive a foundational tenet of post-structuralism: Language is constitutive rather than reflective of reality insofar as the world carries no inherent meaning outside that which is ascribed to it by the signifying role of language. This perspective informs Derrida's famous claim: "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (Derrida, 1967, p. 156), which is often mis-translated as "there is nothing outside of text" and therefore taken as a denial of extra-textual 'reality'. However, the phrase is perhaps best translated as "there is no outside text", no objective parameter against which to measure representational accuracy and therefore no way of knowing the world that is not somehow textually mediated. Post-structuralism has built on the insights of structuralism by drawing attention to the way representations are mediated by historically situated socio-cultural discourses and ideologies that provide the contexts, embedded in the conceptual and power configurations of a given era, within which meanings are produced and circulated. As a result, it posits representation as the process through which social relations and subjectivities are constituted, negotiated and contested (Castle, 2006;

external to itself in transparent and unproblematic fashion (Hubbard, 2006; Dixon & Jones III, 2004; Kneale, 2003; Barnes & Duncan, 1992). Instead, literary texts (along with a broad array of other cultural texts) generate representations that contribute to the very constitution of the geographies and spatialities to which they refer:

[Representation] can be theoretically distinguished from re-representation by reserving the latter's meaning as implying the impossible, namely, capturing and reflecting – as in confirming and mirroring – a real-world referent in thought, language and visual media. Representation, by contrast, refers to the social mediation of the real world through ever-present processes of signification. (Dixon & Jones III, 2004, p. 88)

Thus, literature can be conceptualized as a signifying practice insofar as it imbues the geographical world with meanings that are contingent upon social, cultural and historical discourses and contexts. Following Soja (1996), one might refer to literature as a 'third space' created through the imaginative signification of the material world and its role in the operations of everyday life (see Tyner, 2004). Such a perspective, insists Ogborn (2006), "recognizes that 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" (p. 146).

In recent years the study of representation from a post-structural perspective within the discipline of geography has been criticized by proponents of what has been

Abrams, 2005; Strohmayr, 2005; Dixon & Jones III, 2004; Johnston & Sidaway, 2004; Pratt, 2000; Barnes & Duncan, 1992).

called non-representational theory. Such critics argue that post-structural geographers reduce the world to a series of interconnected texts that lie in wait to be deconstructed at the expense of considering the outcome of embodied practices of material places and spaces (see Nash, 2000 and Lorimer, 2005 for reviews of non-representational theory in geography). As Hubbard (2006) points out, an emphasis on practice “demands that researchers consider urban spaces as embodied and lived, not just imagined and represented” (p. 121). It follows, that for non-representational geographers, “the focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, pre-cognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions” (Lorimer, 2005, p. 92). For these scholars, the material spaces in which such practices and performances occur are of central importance to the constitution of social and cultural forms.

While it is reasonable to caution against getting caught up in the play of words and images, and to remind geographers that the experience of the material world must remain a paramount concern of the discipline, I agree with Hubbard (2006) that the non-representational critique is “misplaced” and overstated. Indeed, I would argue that it relies on the creation of false binaries – between representation and practice, text and materiality – that are not endorsed by a post-structural perspective. Rather, as Ogborn’s quote above captures nicely, a post-structural perspective holds that the representational and practical, the textual and material are inevitably

entwined and ultimately inseparable (see Hubbard, 2006; Latham & McCormack, 2004). As Doel writes, post-structural geographers,

do not wish to elude the gravitational pull of the world in order to float freely amongst signs and images. Rather, we [post-structuralists] affirm the falling back of signs and images into the play of the world. We remain – as always – resolutely materialist. So, we are struck by the *force* of signs, by the *intensity* of images, and by the *affects* of language. ‘The evil demon of language resides in its capacity to become object, where one expects a subject and meaning’ [Baudrillard 1988, p. 84]. [...] So, we no longer recognise anything other than material and immaterial forces, the differential relations between forces, and their incessant shuffling. Whatever there may be, it always *strikes* someone or other as an articulation of *force*. (Doel, 2004, p. 150-5, emphasis in original)

The point here is that a post-structural perspective implies the co-constitution of representations and the material world of everyday life. It is underscored by the belief that the way objects and practices are imagined shapes their form and articulation, and that the reverse is true as well. Of course, this is not to say that it is always possible or productive to establish linear pathways between texts and everyday life. The influence of one over the other may not always be obvious. Then again, if the two are fully imbricated, such an exercise would seem rather futile and reductionist in the first place.

If representations (literary and otherwise) do not simply reflect (with more or less accuracy) pre-existing meanings associated with the geographical world but rather contribute to the constitution thereof, one must attend to the contextual embeddedness of the meanings being produced. Here we come to somewhat of a

crossroads. For many post-structuralist scholars – especially those influenced by the ideas of Michel Foucault and the new historicism to which they gave rise – the meanings generated by textual representations of various kinds are worth studying because they reflect and reproduce power-infused discourses. Discourses, according to the seminal definition offered by Barnes and Duncan (1992), are “frameworks that embrace particular combinations of narratives, concepts, ideologies and signifying practices relevant to a particular realm of social action” (p. 12; see also Campbell, 2009). Far from innocent formations, they are often underscored by social relations of power, repressive ideologies, hegemonic structures and problematic value-systems. Consequently, for many geographers, the goal of textual analysis has been to reveal how representations reproduce and naturalize these situated discourses. This approach has repeatedly produced insightful and politically relevant readings of literary works. However, as Morris (2003) notes, it is generally not attuned to the agency of representational texts with respect to destabilizing entrenched discourses and/or generating alternative perspectives that might come to inform the conduct of social and political life (see also Culler, 1997).

In an effort to elaborate an alternative to approaching representations primarily as manifestations of hegemonic discourses, Morris (2003) draws on the work of Jurgen Habermas, who argued that the signifying potential of literary language comes from its lack of ‘illocutionary force’, a feature that distinguishes it from the language practices of everyday life. As Morris (2003) explains:

Literature is not involved in problem solving and validity testing in the same direct way as language that is participating in the world's transactions and business. This neutralising of a speech act's normal binding force empowers it 'for the playful creation of new worlds – or, rather, for the pure demonstration of the world-disclosing force of innovative linguistic expressions' (Habermas, 1987, p. 201). This 'world-disclosing' force of literary language, Habermas claims, binds together the particular with the universal. In order to satisfy readers who are not held by the illocutionary force of dealing with the world's ongoing business, a literary text has to be recognized as worth the telling. Habermas claims, 'In its content, a tellable text reaches beyond the local context of the immediate speech situation and is open to further elaboration' (Habermas, 1987, p. 203). Literary language, unlike scientific language, is characterized by its capacity for the creative imagining of other possible worlds. (p. 153-4)

Based on this theorization, the relationship between representation and discourse need not be purely symptomatic, but rather transformative. That is to say, one is encouraged to adopt a more open-ended perspective that considers the contribution of literary and other texts to shaping conceptions of society and spaces (rather than invariably reflecting and reproducing situated discourses). Consequently, as a geographer, I conceptualize (literary) representation as a site where the geographical imagination – our understanding of “the significance of space, place and landscape in the making and meaning of social and cultural life” (Schwartz & Ryan, 2003, p. 9; see also Harvey, 1990; Gregory, 2009b) – is produced and communicated, destabilized and reinvented within its contexts of production and reception.

Given the above, how might we regard the intersection between the representation of urban life in the novels under analysis and informal urban citizenship in the

multicultural city? I would argue that the answer relates to how the novels signify the relationship between urban space, the production of identity and urban social positioning. Put differently, the value of studying literature in the present case lies in the images and imaginings of informal urban citizenship produced through representations of socio-spatial life in the city. If we accept the post-structural notion that society and space cannot be apprehended outside the representations we create of them, then novels can be regarded as an important site where the politics of informal urban citizenship are constituted and circulated. Indeed, one might argue that literature can be said to generate a social and geographical imaginary of informal urban citizenship that has the potential to shape and reshape conceptions of social relations in the multicultural city. Moreover, it has the potential to variously reinforce, challenge and redefine the discourses that inform cultural pluralism in cities like Toronto and London. Ultimately, as Brydon (2007) has argued, literature is deeply implicated in the imaginings and re-imaginings of citizenship within contemporary urban contexts and the discourses surrounding them.

Literature, interpretation and the production of meaning

If one accepts that, in the present case, the value of studying literature stems from the meanings it generates, then a logical next step is to consider how literature generates meaning or, perhaps more accurately, how meaning is generated around literature. A discussion of this point not only provides a necessary elaboration on

how I conceptualize my object of study, but also allows me to position myself as a reader-analyst fully involved in the process of meaning construction. I propose to broach the subject at hand by exploring Ricoeur's (1984) pregnant contention that "literary work[s] acquire a meaning in the full sense of the term, at the intersection of the world projected by the text and the life-world of the reader" ([Vol II], p. 160).¹⁹ I find this a useful starting point because it captures how the meaning of a literary text is not primarily linked to a single one of the following elements, all of which have been upheld by different theoretical schools at different times as the primary site of meaning construction: authorial intent, the text itself, the reader reception, or the boundless contexts within which the three can be inserted. Rather, to me, Ricoeur's contention implies that meaning results from a complex synergy of at least all four elements – author, text, reader and context (Culler, 1997). This aligns me with Hones (2008) who conceptualizes literary interpretation as an inevitably spatial 'event' that brings together these diverse elements, each with their own histories and trajectories, to create meaning. I propose to explore this notion further by drawing from various theories of literature in order to develop what I consider to be a satisfactory conception of literary interpretation.

Ricoeur's reference to 'the world projected by the text' highlights the way literary texts – and in particular realist novels of the sort on which I focus in this thesis – offer a situated representation of society and space. The world projected by the text

¹⁹ See also Clark (2006) on Gadamer's hermeneutics, from whence Ricoeur developed his conception of literary signification. Ricoeur's statement also recalls Barthes' (1977) aim to join text and reader in a "single signifying practice" (in Black, 2006, p. 156).

is constituted by an amalgam of often interrelated elements and factors that inform the production of textual meaning. First, one might point to the obvious influence exerted by authorial choices, objectives, motivations, values, and positioning on the production of fictional worlds. While Barthes' influential discussion on the 'death of the author' and the rise of post-structuralism (with its emphasis on discursive contexts) has long since dislodged the notion that the author is the ultimate arbiter of textual meaning, it is undeniable that the author, as agent, sets some of the parameters from which meaning is ultimately generated. Second, and also quite predictably, the world projected by the text is shaped by the particular discourses that define the socio-culturally and historically contingent context of production of a literary work. It is important to note that literary representations are generated *in function of* – which is not to say in strict agreement with – such discourses and the associated power relations, ideologies, values and strategies of resistance (Jordan and Weedon, 2006; Morris, 2003). Third, one might refer to the influence of literary genre or sub-genre, whose properties and conventions offer a pre-determined 'model of writing' for the author that shapes textual outcomes. This is so even if the author or the aesthetic movement to which he or she belongs is driven partly by a desire to challenge generic orthodoxies (Tavares & Le Bel, 2008; Abrams, 2005; Todorov, 1990).²⁰ Fourth, the production of meaning is accomplished in part through a range of intertextual associations between a given text and preceding,

²⁰ For a sustained discussion on how literary genre informs the production of spatial representations, see Tavares and Le Bel (2008), who argue that the representation of South America in the travel writing of Chilean author Luis Sepulveda is a product of interplay between the boundaries imposed by the travelogue genre and an imaginative geography of the continent as a space of the fantastic.

ancillary or subsequent texts. Insofar as these associations can be made by the text itself – through explicit or implicit reference – they contribute to the ‘world’ it projects (Childs & Fowler, 2006; Allen, 2000; Genette, 1997). Fifth, one might point to the formal dimensions of a literary text – narrative structure, use of language, rhetorical strategies, literary devices, and so forth – and how these generate verisimilitude through a series of ‘reality effects’.²¹ Verisimilitude is key because it naturalizes the ‘world’ projected by the text.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the ways in which literary and other cultural texts exert an influence over the meanings generated from and around them. Yet it is sufficient to raise an important question: To what extent do the forces that shape the world projected by the text inform the interpretation conducted by the reader? In other words, how much latitude does the reader have in the act of interpretation? (Iser, 2006). The answer to this question differs widely among theoretical schools. For example, structural semiotics argues that meaning is derived in large measure from the activation of textual codes during the process of reading, suggesting that the text itself is the primary arbiter of meaning. Others (as we shall see below) place more emphasis on the reader and the context of reading. I draw my own answer to this question from the general standpoint of Iser, who argues that texts can encourage the apprehension of certain meanings through the

²¹ The term reality-effect is attributable to Barthes (1960) who used it to describe those aspects of narrative that contribute to a text’s verisimilitude – its likeness or resemblance to reality or fact. Morris (2003) offers an insightful discussion of three different categories of reality effects – ‘the empirical effect’, ‘the truth effect’ and ‘the character effect’. See also Allen (2003).

production of an implied reader. As Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack (2002) explain, “Wolfgang Iser defines the implied reader as a hypothetical figure or concept produced through the assumptions, beliefs, historical knowledge, and philosophical and political positions embedded in and constituting the structure of a given text” (p. 47). Put simply, the world projected by the text becomes hospitable to particular interpretations that are fostered by the various elements that create it in the first place. While the implied reader and the actual reader may overlap in terms of how the text is apprehended, they are not one and the same. Indeed the difference between the two – which is effectively the difference between reader and text – is what affords the actual reader a constitutive role in the production of textual meaning.

We can now turn to the second part of Ricoeur’s statement, which brings us into the realm of reader-response theory, “an approach to literary and cultural texts that focuses on the role of the reader in the creation of meaning” (Castle, 2006, p. 174). Reader-response scholars are unified in claiming that the production of meaning in any literary text is to a considerable degree accomplished by the reader (even if they differ on the extent to which texts engender particular readings over others) (Castle, 2006; Iser, 2006; Abrams, 2005). Following Barthes (1977), some go as far as to decry the ‘death of the author’, thereby freeing the reader or critic to approach a literary text in relation to its limitless signifying possibilities.²² As Morris (2003)

²² However, according to Belsey (2005), this somewhat misses Barthes’ point. She argues that Barthes conceptualized the reader as “no more than the destination of the multiple writings and intertextual relations that make up the text itself. In other

explains, the seminal work of Stanley Fish takes this one step further by arguing that:

The meaning of a literary work and its formal structures are all produced by the interpretive assumptions and strategies that the reader brings to the text. For Fish, meaning and structure have no independent existence outside of the reading experience. The end point of this logic is Fish's insistence that it is the reader who 'writes' the text which only comes into being by means of the interpretive activity that is reading/writing. (p. 120-121)

Irrespective of whether one is willing to accept Fish's rather partisan argument and locate the production of meaning squarely on the reader, it does serve to reinforce the notion that literary texts are written at least in part as they are read. Consequently, it is important for the analyst to understand the main forces that inform the interpretive outcome of textual readings. Once again five such forces can be identified, many of which are complements to the forces that impinge upon the production of the text itself.

First, and unavoidably, textual readings are informed by the individual experience and background of the reader as well as the personal fantasies, desires and expectations he or she imposes on the text (Abrams, 2005). Second, following Fish (1980), the apprehension of a text is influenced by the 'interpretive community' to which a reader or critic belongs and whose common set of assumptions and reading methods he or she shares either implicitly or explicitly with other similarly positioned

words, the essay [by Barthes] does not support a vague subjectivism, in which the text means whatever it means to me, and there is nothing to discuss" (Belsey 2005, p. 163).

individuals (see Fish, 1980 in Morris, 2003). For Fish (1980), “interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading [in the conventional sense] but for writing texts [in the metaphorical sense], for constituting their properties. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round” (p. 14 in Hawthorne 1994, p. 98). This concept seems particularly relevant within the context of academic interpretation, which is characterized by the existence of distinct theoretical standpoints and methodological approaches that go a long way toward determining the outcome of textual interpretations. Third, following Foucault, one must inevitably point to the discourses that define a horizon or context of reception during any socio-historically contingent moment of reading. For Foucault, discourses set the parameters for what can be known and said and therefore shape meanings attributable to a particular text at a given time and place (Dixon & Jones III, 2004).

The final two points have an inevitable measure of overlap with the three above, but are also autonomous enough to be dealt with independently. Fourth, one can return to the concept of intertextuality, which is relevant here insofar as a text is apprehended partly in relation to other texts with which it is associated by the reader. That is to say, intertextual theory maintains that the reader does not encounter a text as an autonomous unit, but rather as part of a broader intertextual network within which it acquires meaning for him or her. Thus, the establishment of relationships between one text and others is a key way in which the reader

generates meaning from a text (Childs & Fowler, 2006; Allen, 2000). Fifth, and finally for our purposes, is the role of genre in the outcome of textual readings. Much as the conventions of genre offer a model of writing for the author (a point mentioned above), they also generate a 'horizon of expectation' for readers. Regardless of whether the expectations engendered are satisfied or controverted, they produce a (culturally determined) framework for reading that conditions how a reader will approach and therefore apprehend a given text (Todorov, 1990; see also Tavares & Le Bel, 2008).

In light of the multiple elements that inform the construction of textual meaning, one can see the merits of Hones' (2008) conception of literary interpretation as an 'event'. She proposes that "a work of academic analysis [...] can be understood as something that can only emerge in the interaction of agents: writers, readers, texts, networks, and contexts" (Hones, 2008, p. 1310). Expanding on this point, Hones (2008) writes:

And the 'something' that emerges is always going to be both unprecedented and contingent, because just as the 'here and now' of space and place are always both internally various and externally extensive, so the contextual 'here and now' of a literary or academic text event is also hugely complex both in its internal multiplicity and in its spatial and historical extensions. Space as the dimension in which previously unconnected narratives or historical trajectories meet up and interact (Massey, 2005) is also, more specifically, the dimension in which writing and reading can take place. (p. 1310-1311)

Hones successfully captures the temporal and spatial contingency of interpretations and the multiple influences at play. However, I find that her theorization is less adept at capturing the dynamic, iterative exchanges that underpin the interpretive event. It also opens itself to being charged with infinite relativism insofar as, in her explanation, the outcome of the event (read: the production of meaning) is based on the intersection of multiple factors during a spatial and temporal instant.

In order to move beyond these limitations, I find it productive to approach the original statement by Ricoeur in relation to Brosseau's (1995, 1994) adaptation of Bakhtin's dialogical principle and the underlying hermeneutic approach to literary interpretation. Simplified, Bakhtin's dialogic principle holds that, as a communicative device, language creates meaning through interlocution or dialogue that is underlain by differences between the parties involved. These differences are metaphorically 'bridged' by language, which, in the process, is capable of generating new ideas and positions (Pearce, 2006). Thus, the process of interpretation can be regarded as a dialogical exchange between the 'world projected by the text and the life-world of the reader', each of which, as we have seen, is informed by multiple factors.

Writing from within the discipline of geography, Brosseau (1995) argues that analysts need to acknowledge the agency of literary texts insofar as they set the parameters for their own interpretation by functioning as reactive entities that engender particular interpretive stances and outcomes. Indeed, for him the value

of literary texts as objects of study appears to lie in the way they challenge readers by inviting them to clarify, adjust or change their assumptions and standpoints or come up with new ones altogether (Brosseau, 1995; see also Morris, 2003). This position is reflective of Gadamer's hermeneutics, which holds that readers should not seek to remake a text in their own image, but rather "refine, confirm or refute" their perspectives by opening themselves up to an exchange that is sensitive to the differences between the text and themselves (Clarke, 2006). As Brosseau acknowledges, this exchange or dialogue that takes place is necessarily asymmetrical, since it is unavoidably guided by the interests, perspectives, theories and discourses brought to bear on the text by the analyst. These ensure that a text has no fixed meaning and that the dialogue has the potential to be reactivated on an ongoing basis as new points of departure for dynamic exchange emerge. Crucially, for Brosseau (1995) a dialogical conception of literary interpretation straddles the poles between "an autonomous and self-celebrating reader who transforms the text into a pre-text" and "a stagnant notion of text [...] that makes it the guarantor of a deeply entrenched permanent meaning" (p. 91). As such it can be understood in the spirit of hermeneutic analysis, summed up neatly by Clark (2006): "Just as the final sense of a close conversation originates in neither of its two speakers, but is a shared product, so the understanding of the text finally reached is not only our own understanding, but also an act of the text itself as it continues to make a claim upon us" (p. 62).

From the perspective above, the interpretation of literary texts is, in effect, a matter of ongoing performance whose ultimate conclusion is perpetually deferred (Newton,

2006). Any interpretation is necessarily provisional and contingent given the possibility of injecting new life into the dialogue over time (see Dixon & Jones III, 2004). Consequently, hermeneutic interpretation, like post-structuralism (with its claim that meaning is produced through representation), has been charged by some with being overly relativistic, since it seems to accept the possibility of an infinite number of competing readings. However, as Duncan and Ley (1993) maintain, accepting meaning to be the outcome of a dynamic dialogue between reader and text, one that is influenced by a wide variety of factors, problematizes the process of representation without necessarily dismissing the validity or value of interpretive outcomes as just one of many possible readings. Rather, it opens a space for evaluating the validity of interpretations in relation to the content of the text itself and to broader intellectual and socio-historical climates (see Gergen & Gergen, 2000). In other words, an interpretation must convince those amongst whom it circulates of its validity and pertinence relative to present day thought and action (Culler, 1997). In the first instance, this is accomplished by grounding and substantiating interpretations with reference to the text itself. That is to say, the text must remain the parameter of interpretation. In the second instance, it is accomplished by placing a text and the interpretation thereof in relation to relevant scholarly, intellectual, institutional, social, cultural, political, and/or economic contexts and discourses. As Culler (1997) notes in a disarmingly simple insight, “[r]eference to the world is not so much a property of literary works as a function they are given by interpretation” (p. 32). As a result, contextualization is key to establishing the relevance and overall currency of interpretive outcomes. Thus, interpretations may

be provisional and contingent, but they are no less relevant as a result, since they have the potential for geographers to reinforce, refine, refute or replace existing geographical imaginations.

Selection and analysis of the novels

Selection

As identified in the introduction, the corpus of works to be analyzed consists of three novels each written by a different author. Following Brosseau (1995), selection of this corpus proceeded in dialogical fashion. That is to say, the selection of works occurred in tandem with, and was indeed a key component of, the thematic and theoretical development of the research project itself. An initial interest in literary representations of life in the contemporary multicultural city guided exploratory readings of potential objects of study. These readings resulted in a more refined interest in the textual relationships between urban space and identity formation in novels that depict the urban lives of second-generation characters. Informed by existing research in literary geography and spatial theory, it was decided to select novels that would allow for a focus on the representation of spatial identity politics and their outcomes in terms of informal urban citizenship in the multicultural city. Arrived at dialogically, the final 'package' comprises an analysis of novels that prioritize urban spaces in their engagement with themes of identity and belonging, social positioning and recognition among second-generation characters in Toronto

and London, two different, yet ultimately comparable urban contexts marked by cultural pluralism.

There are two additional, ultimately interrelated, points that I would like to make relative to the selection of novels to be analyzed. First, the decision was made to work with a limited number of novels in order to allow for a close textual and contextual reading of the representation of informal urban citizenship in each work. It is my contention that through an analysis of the three novels chosen, it will be possible to exemplify, through detailed and nuanced readings, the capacity of literary representations to shape the geographical imaginary urban citizenship among second generations in Toronto and London, as well as the multicultural city more generally. Second, the commonalities and differences evident in the representation of the themes under consideration in these novels will allow me to conclude the thesis by registering both the similarity and singularity of the representations produced and circulated in each novel. While it is not my intention to undertake a formal comparison between the novels based on clearly identified criteria, I nonetheless contend that, taken together, the novels complement each other by offering somewhat different outcomes in terms of how the production of spatial identities informs informal urban citizenship among second generations. By juxtaposing these outcomes, I hope to register the complexity of literary interventions into the geographical imaginary of social life in the multicultural city.

Analysis

My analysis of the novels adopts informal urban citizenship as its organizing concept. To begin with, this concept is useful because it provides a framework for discussing the meanings and politics that emerge from the representation of spatial identities among second-generation youth in the novels. Put differently, the spatially embedded actions, interactions, relationships, and events involving the characters take on added significance, relevance and political currency when read in relation to the organizing concept I have chosen. In addition, conducting an analysis of the ways in which the novels represent urban citizenship offers a point of departure for considering how they respond to current debates on cultural pluralism at a variety of scales. In this case, the everyday spatial negotiations of identity depicted in the novels can be regarded as generating a politics whose relevance extends beyond the immediate context from which it emerged.

Based on this organizing concept and how it fits with the broader objectives of the thesis, my analysis of the novels is guided by a series of central questions. These questions should not be regarded as a rigid grid that will be imposed on the novels in order to generate a certain analytical outcome, but rather a looser framework for interpretation emerging from my dialogical approach to the objects of study. Indeed, by pursuing the dialogical approach identified above, I have in part allowed the novels, or at least my initial reading of them, to generate the questions that will guide my analysis. That is, I have tried to be sensitive to the sort of interrogation

that the text fosters through the particular themes raised, to role of place in the narrative action, the choice of characters and so forth. The central questions include:

- What are the places and spaces of everyday life for the second-generation characters in the novels? How are these inhabited and negotiated?
- What social interactions, relationships and experiences do the everyday urban geographies of the characters promote?
- How does urban space factor into the textual production and development of social identities among the characters?
- How might such identities be considered political? What basis do they provide for social marginalization, recognition, status, positioning and/or belonging?
- What is the outcome of these spatial identity politics in terms of informal urban citizenship amongst the characters? To what extent are the characters able to claim their 'right to the city' and to what extent is this denied or curtailed?
- How does the particular representation of informal urban citizenship circulated by each novel respond to discourses and debates concerning

cultural pluralism and difference in Canada and the UK respectively? How does the representation of urban life in the novels inform notions of national belonging and membership in these two countries?

- Finally, and by way of conclusion, does the critical reception of these novels in the popular media point to a role for literature as a medium through which conceptions of informal urban citizenship are articulated, debated and imagined?

In seeking to answer these questions, my goal is to produce an analysis of the novels that has two interrelated components. The first component is an interpretation of each novel that offers a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of how the negotiation of identity in urban spaces shapes informal urban citizenship among the various characters. As Geertz (1973) argued:

A good interpretation of anything – a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society – takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. When it does not do that, but leads us instead somewhere else – into an admiration of its own elegance, of its authors cleverness, or of the beauties of Euclidean order – it may have its intrinsic charms; but it is something else than what the task at hand [...] calls for. (p. 18)

Here, Geertz is cautioning the reader to remain grounded in the object of interpretation rather than transforming it into a pretext for abstracted or over theorized discussions. Following Geertz, in Chapters Three, Five and Six, I offer a close reading of each novel that discusses how the experience and inhabitation of

different spaces and places inform the urban identities of the characters, as well as the outcomes this has in terms of social membership, inclusion and belonging.²³ The second component of the analysis is to contextualize my findings by considering the broader significance and relevance of the representations uncovered. Thus, in Chapters Four and Seven, I propose that the representations of informal urban citizenship in the novels offer pointed interventions into debates on the politics of pluralism in Canada and the UK.

²³ In these chapters I stick closely to the textual content of the novels. As a result, they contain few references to scholarly sources. When actually conducting the interpretation of a literary text, I find that repeatedly referencing scholarly sources can be counterproductive. At worst, it can foster an analytical dynamic in which the content of the novel becomes an illustration of phenomena discussed in the academic works cited. In order to avoid this tendency, my preference is to offer interpretations of literary texts that are bookended on one side by an analytical framework drawn from scholarly sources and, on the other, by reference to scholarship in relation to which the interpretation can be contextualized.

SECTION II

THE REPRESENTATION OF INFORMAL URBAN CITIZENSHIP IN TORONTO: THE LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES OF DIONNE BRAND'S *WHAT WE ALL LONG FOR*

INTRODUCTION

In this city there are Bulgarian mechanics, there are Eritrean accountants, Colombian café owners, Latvian book publishers, Welsh roofers, Afghani dancers, Iranian mathematicians, Tamil cooks in Thai restaurants, Calabrese boys with Jamaican accents, Fushen deejays, Filipina-Saudi beauticians, Russian doctors changing tires, there are Romanian bill collectors, Cape Cod fishmongers, Japanese grocery clerks, French gas meter readers, German bakers, Haitian and Bengali taxi drivers with Irish dispatchers.

Lives in the city are doubled, tripled, conjugated – women and men all trying to handle their own chain of events, trying to keep the story straight in their own heads. At times they catch themselves in sensational lies, embellishing or avoiding a nasty secret here and there, juggling the lines of causality, and before you know it, it's impossible to tell one thread from another. In this city, like everywhere, people work, they eat, they drink, they have sex, but it's hard not to wake up here without the certainty of misapprehension. (Brand, 2005, p. 5)

The passage above leaves the reader with little doubt: The subject of Dionne Brand's recent novel *What We All Long For* is above all else the cultural diversity of contemporary Toronto, considered by many analysts to be the quintessential multicultural city of the 21st century (Fong, 2006; Anisef & Lanphier, 2003).²⁴ As the passage further suggests, the novel is not simply about the discrete cultural

²⁴ According to Statistics Canada, in 2006 45.7% of Toronto's population was born outside of Canada. Further pointing to the multi-cultural credentials of the city, 42.9% of Toronto's population self-identified as visible minorities in 2006, a figure that reflects a generalized shift in the origin of immigrants (from Europe to Asia/Middle East and to a lesser extent Africa and the Americas) since the 1970s.

communities that coexist in a single city, but also about the way in which these communities interact and intersect in ways that destabilize established categories of identity. Indeed, Brand offers the reader both a tale of marginalized immigrants living in insular communities and a tale of second-generation youth whose urban social identities refuse to be contained by the boundaries of these discrete communities. In the first instance, the novel chronicles the urban lives and experiences of 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 life in the city. Each set of experiences is different and coloured by the particularities of the character's background, yet striking commonalities can be drawn between the urban lives of the immigrant characters in the novel. In the second instance, attention is cast on the everyday urban lives, experiences and geographies of a generation born in Toronto to immigrant parents. Most readers would undoubtedly consider this to be the main focus of the novel, the central theme being the reformulation of identity undergone by second-generation youth as they seek to define the terms on which they are inserted into the social world of the city.

As a geographer, my interest in Brand's novel lies in the way in which the spaces of the city, and in particular the quotidian inhabitation thereof, play a key role in structuring the urban lives and social identities of both Brand's immigrant characters and their second-generation children, albeit in ways that differ significantly between the two generations under consideration. A discussion of these differences will lead

me to argue that *What We All Long For* generates a poignant representation of the socio-spatial processes through which informal urban citizenship is constituted and contested in the multicultural city. However, before proceeding with a more detailed outline of the central argument I wish to pursue in this chapter, a few introductory words on the author and her novel.

Self identified as Black and lesbian, Dionne Brand is one of Canada's foremost contemporary literary figures. Born in the Trinidadian village of Guayaguayare in 1953, Brand immigrated to Canada in 1970, settling in Toronto where she worked in various community-related jobs and pursued undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto. In the decade following the completion of her BA in 1975, Brand continued to engage in community work and activism with a focus on combating racism, sexism and discrimination in the labour force and educational system as well as in Canadian society more generally. She also pursued graduate studies, eventually leaving a PhD degree to work for the National Film Board of Canada making a series of documentary films on women's issues. Since the early 1990s, Brand has held several appointments at major universities across North America and was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2006. 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 work having been recognized by a Governor General's Award and a Trillium Award as well a number of other Canadian literary awards and nominations. Perhaps the defining characteristic of Brand's poetry is its political

resonance, concerned as it is with experiences of racism, colonialism and cultural imperialism, women and sexism, migrant exile and displacement, and the related questions of social identity, belonging and marginalization. These and associated themes have also been explored at length in Brand's non-fiction work (which includes essays, histories and autobiography) as well as, most recently, in her novels. Brand's first novel, *In Another Place, Not Here* was published in 1996 and was followed up by a second novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, in 1999. Both 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 (Dudek, 2007; Contemporary Authors Online, 2006). Brand's third and most recent novel, *What We All Long For* (2005), exhibits lines of continuity with her previous work, namely in its exploration of racism, migrant experience and social marginalization. Yet this novel stands apart from her previous novels both in terms of its contemporary Canadian setting and its forward-looking representation of identity in the global city.

What We All Long For is set largely in Toronto, with occasional changes in geographical setting that fill in the personal trajectories of individual characters. The majority of the action occurs during the late spring and early summer of 2002 as the city emerges from the grip of winter. Having said this, on a number of occasions the narrative tracks back in time to describe past experiences and significant events in the lives of the novel's characters. *What We All Long For* depicts the everyday

urban lives of Tuyen, Carla, Oku and Jackie, an ethnically and racially diverse group of close friends in their early twenties who first met in high school. These four main characters are all second-generation Torontonians, raised in the city by immigrant parents who constitute Brand's secondary cast of characters. Tuyen, who is arguably the novel's most salient character, is the daughter of Vietnamese refugees (Cam and Tuan) who have become successful restaurant owners after years of struggle following their arrival in Toronto. Tuyen is an avant-garde artist in love with Carla, a bicycle courier who lives in the same downtown apartment building, but who does not reciprocate Tuyen's amorous affections. Carla (along with her younger brother Jamal) is the product of a turbulent affair between Angie (a daughter of Italian immigrants) and Derek (a Jamaican immigrant) that resulted in Angie's suicide when Carla was still a child. As a result, she and her brother were raised by their father whose loveless disinterest in them breeds a deep-seated resentment that is not assuaged by the kindness with which they are treated by their Jamaican step mother, Nadine. This brings us to Oku, the son of Jamaican immigrants (Claire and Fitz), with whom he continues to live after abandoning an MA degree at the University of Toronto, a move he has yet to confess to his parents. Oku, who sees himself as a soulful poet more than an academic, longs for the beautiful and enigmatic Jackie, the daughter of Black Nova Scotians (the Bernards) that moved to Toronto from Halifax when she was a child. A fashion aficionado, Jackie owns a small but trendy "post bourgeois" clothing store and, much to Oku's frustration, dates a German heavy metal guitarist (see Table 1 for a list of main characters and the basic relationships between them). The relationships

and interactions among the four main characters and between each of them and their respective families is the basis of Brand's narrative. These interpersonal dynamics are a starting point for a nuanced exploration of the generational and intergenerational similarities and differences with respect to the ways in which ethnicity and race influence urban experience and social identity within the broader context of multicultural Toronto.

What We All Long For is very rich in spatial referents, a characteristic that makes it inherently attractive to geographers. The urban geographies inhabited by the four main characters and their families during everyday life in the city are identified and evoked with considerable care and attention to detail at every turn of the page. To begin with, most of the narrative action occurs in places across the City of Toronto that are almost invariably named, located and described in the text. Such is the precision of these geographical referents that it becomes possible to plot them accurately on a map of Toronto, thereby generating a visual representation of the everyday geographies of Brand's characters that reveals the differences and similarities between their respective inhabitations of the city.²⁵ More than simply locating the narrative action, the vast array of places referred to in the text allows Brand to represent a diverse array of urban spaces that are defined in the novel largely by the particular ethno-racial and socio-economic composition of their inhabitants. Thus, the geography of the novel ranges from the low-income Black

²⁵ The cartographic impulse generated by the text is hard to resist. Maps that illustrate my spatial reading of *What We All Long For* appear in Chapter Three that follows.

neighbourhood of Alexandra Park to the wealthy White-Anglophone neighbourhood of High Park, from ethnic neighbourhoods such as Little Jamaica to the multicultural Kensington Market, from the sprawling suburb of Richmond Hill to the downtown urbanity of Queen Street West, to name but a few of the places and corresponding spaces in which the novel is set. Ultimately, the spatial embeddedness of the narrative action calls for a reading of Brand's novel that is sensitive to the relationship between the text's geographies and the development of the characters and their subjectivities. In other words, *What We All Long For* fosters an analysis of how place and space act as strategic properties through which social identities and the politics thereof are constituted and negotiated in Brand's representation of multicultural Toronto.

It is precisely a spatial reading of Brand's novel that I wish to undertake. In keeping with the analytical framework outlined in Chapter Two, my specific focus is on the relationship between the production (and performance) of socio-spatial identities and informal urban citizenship among Brand's characters. My analysis is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is essentially a close reading of the novel aimed at revealing the intersection between space and identity in relation to both generations of characters in the novel. It begins by considering how, in the case of Brand's immigrant characters, powerful structural forces work in and through space to assign them narrowly defined ethnically and racially predicated socio-spatial urban identities. This has the effect of limiting informal urban citizenship by denying them agency over their terms of inclusion within the social (and indeed economic)

circuits of the city. The chapter then discusses how Brand's second-generation characters all resist being defined according to the same socio-spatial identities imposed on their parents. This resistance, it is subsequently argued, is the starting point for a spatially negotiated process of individual and collective identity formation of their own that is underscored by the quotidian encounter with multiple, intersecting forms of urban difference in downtown Toronto. Ultimately, the emergent identity of the novel's second-generation characters becomes politicized as the basis upon which they contest informal urban citizenship in multicultural Toronto.

The second chapter considers the significance of the analysis developed in the previous one in terms of a broader discursive context. It begins by proposing that *What We All Long For* encourages its readership to apprehend the author's representation of urban life among both generations of characters in light of relationships of power that underscore social and economic life in Toronto. More specifically, it argues that the politics of space and identity – and the concomitant struggles over informal urban citizenship – represented in the novel are framed by a narrative context of ethnic and race relations in which White, Anglo-European Torontonians hold a dominant position. This in turn leads me to consider how Brand's representation of socio-spatial life in Toronto intervenes in broader academic (and indeed popular) debates about the cultural politics of multiculturalism in Canada. My approach is to discuss recent scholarship that critiques the socio-economic relationships and structures of power that underpin Canadian

multiculturalism and then outline how I believe this novel makes an important contribution to ongoing debates on the subject.

Despite having only been published four years ago, *What We All Long For* is the subject of a growing body of scholarship to which my reading of the novel adds a new dimension. Dobson (2006) considers how Brand's second-generation characters engage in the production of a community that transcends national, racial and other categories of identity to produce a form of global citizenship. Similarly, for Brydon (2007), *What We All Long For* is read for its representation of diasporic subjectivities in a globalizing world. Other scholars have adopted a more overtly spatial perspective to their analysis of Brand's novel. McKibbin (2008) focuses on how Brand's second-generation characters make Toronto 'home' by carving out personal home spaces in the city (often under adversarial conditions) that replace the uncomfortable home spaces of their respective families. Meanwhile Brosseau and Tavares (2008) argue that the multiplicity of urban spaces and perspectives present in the novel generate a polyphonic narrative particularly suited to capturing the diversity of the contemporary multicultural city. Finally, Johansen (2008) draws on the scholarship of Saskia Sassen and Walter Benjamin to propose that Brand's second-generation characters negotiate a form of 'territorialized cosmopolitanism' within the global city. My own reading continues to explore the broader themes of identity, belonging, urban space and citizenship initiated in this literature. However, the scholarly starting points, analytical focus and contextualization of my research on *What We All Long For* lead me to complement the existing work on this novel by

exploring a distinct facet of Brand's representation of immigrants and their children in Toronto.

Table 1: Cast of characters in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*. The four primary characters are close friends in their early twenties, who are all second-generation Torontonians. The secondary characters are the im/migrant parents of the primary characters. Tertiary characters are listed based on their relationship to primary characters. A final set of characters acquainted to all the primary characters – Kumaran and his crew of graffiti artists – are not listed, but will be referred to in passing during the analysis of the novel.

Principal Characters (Second Generation Torontonians)	Secondary Characters (Im/migrants)	Tertiary Characters
Tuyen Vu <i>Artist; lives in run-down apartment on College Street</i>	Tuan and Cam Vu (Tuyen's parents) <i>Vietnamese refugees; own a Vietnamese restaurant in Chinatown and live in the suburb of Richmond Hill</i>	Binh Vu (Tuyen's younger brother) Ai and Lam Vu (Tuyen's older sisters) Quy (Tuyen's brother) <i>Went missing during the family's escape to Canada</i>
Carla <i>Bike courier; lives next to Tuyen</i>	Angela Chiarelli (Carla's mother) <i>Deceased; raised in Little Italy</i> Derek and Nadine (Carla's father and step mother) <i>Jamaican immigrants</i>	Jamal (Carla's younger brother)
Oku Barker <i>University drop-out; lives with parents</i>	Claire and Fitz Barker (Oku's parents) <i>Jamaican immigrants</i>	Kwesi (Oku's friend)

	<i>living in Toronto's Little Jamaica</i>	
Jackie Bernard <i>Owns second-hand clothing store; lives with parents</i>	Mr and Ms Bernard <i>(Jackie's parents) Black migrants from Nova Scotia living in the social housing estate of Alexandra Park</i>	Reiner Maria (Jackie's German boyfriend)

CHAPTER 3

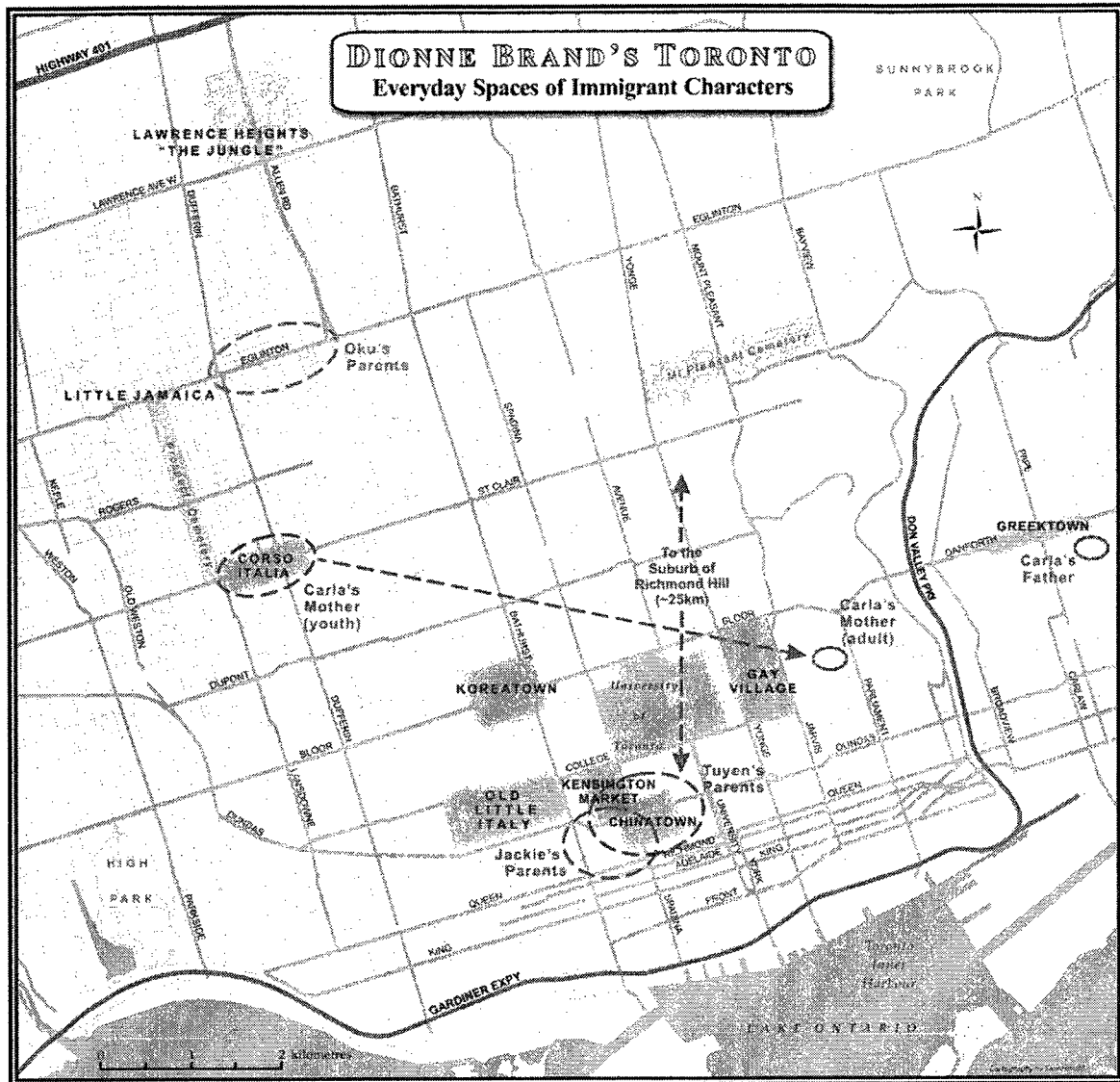
The spatial imperatives of urban identity and informal urban citizenship in Dionne Brand's Toronto

Most readers would likely agree that, above all else, *What We All Long For* is about the social and spatial lives of second-generation youth in contemporary multicultural Toronto. Yet Brand devotes a considerable portion of her narrative to describing the urban lives and experiences of her immigrant characters, the parents of her second-generation protagonists. Indeed, one of the most striking features of Brand's representation of multicultural Toronto is the sharp contrast between the two generations in terms of everyday inhabitations of space in the city and the urban social identities to which these give rise. One might go as far as to say that the representation of one generation is constituted in part through the various ways in which it differs from the other. Thus, while the primary focus of my analysis in this section of the thesis is the spatial identity politics of informal urban citizenship among Brand's second-generation characters, I begin this chapter by exploring the same theme in relation to the parents. This establishes a useful counterpoint for my subsequent discussion on how the second-generation characters renegotiate the relationship between urban space and identity associated with their parents in a way that generates an alternate basis for belonging in the city. Having done so, I will be positioned to move on to the following chapter, which considers how the

production of identity among Brand's main characters constitutes a basis upon which they claim informal urban citizenship in multicultural Toronto.

Bounded lives: Brand's immigrant characters

The urban social identities of Brand's immigrant characters, and to a considerable extent their economic roles as well, are heavily shaped by the inhabitation and experience of immigrant spaces in Toronto (see Map 1). These spaces, which circumscribe virtually every aspect of their life in Toronto, produce and reproduce identities based largely on ethnic and racial belonging. The question here, of course, is to what extent this basis for membership in the urban public is chosen and to what extent it is imposed. While the novel does suggest that personal agency is certainly a factor, in each case it can be argued that agency is overridden by powerful structural forces that confine them to immigrant spaces and to the ethno-racial identities that come with them. In the process they are socially and economically marginalized in multicultural Toronto. The defining and confining action of such structural forces is reinforced by a personal inability of the various parents to come to terms with character-defining elements in their past, such as traumatic events or youthful ambitions that remain unfulfilled. Brand's immigrant characters thus display limited agency over their terms of inclusion within the urban public and are instead subject to external forces that work in and through space to deny them informal urban citizenship.



Map 1: The geographical spaces associated with the immigrant characters in Dionne Brand's novel *What We All Long For*. Each set of characters is associated with a bounded neighbourhood that reflects and reproduces the ethnic and racial basis of their urban identity.

Oku's parents, Claire and Fitz Barker, are a useful point of entry when it comes to elaborating on the line of argument outlined above. Jamaican immigrants, their life-world revolves almost entirely around Toronto's Little Jamaica, which centres on a stretch of Eglinton Avenue West, northeast of 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. (p. 190)

This passage depicts a couple whose urban life is circumscribed by a space that is characterized by the (essentialized) elements of Jamaican culture, which have been transplanted almost wholesale onto a portion of Toronto. The suggestion that they are "unwilling" to step beyond this ethno-spatial milieu suggests agency on their part, a conscious (and legitimate) 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 as Black, ethnic Jamaican immigrants, he and his wife are "unable" to access experiences and opportunities outside the narrow social and spatial boundaries of Little Jamaica. Indeed, Claire rationalizes Fitz's bitterness and the occasional bouts of violence he unleashes on his family, by saying that "he only felt that he had been held back, and were he a

different man in this country, he would be further ahead” (p. 86). This oblique reference, perhaps to an undercurrent of racism and/or to the limited opportunities available to Black Jamaican immigrants in Toronto, suggests to the reader that broader structural forces are largely responsible for confining Fitz and Claire to Little Jamaica and the social identity that comes with living in this neighbourhood.

If structural determinants remain poorly explicated in the case of Oku’s parents, they are elaborated further in relation to Jackie’s parents, whom we know only as the Bernards.²⁶ Having arrived in Toronto in 1980, they settle in the low-income public housing development of Alexandra Park, “that urban warren of buildings and paths” (p. 92) which is home to a large number of Blacks from Nova Scotia, the Caribbean and Africa. For a few short years they thrived in the vibrant sub-culture surrounding the Paramount Club – “the best dance club in the country” (p. 94) – and a string of similar venues where the city’s Black residents went to dance, drink, gamble, posture and make a reputation for themselves. Young, beautiful and hip, Jackie’s parents are able to express themselves in these spaces, while simultaneously finding a temporary escape from the difficulties of making a living in the city, a release “after you didn’t get the job, or got the job and it was shit, or you were tired of the job....” (p. 95). For Jackie’s parents, venues such as the Paramount and the

²⁶ I would like to clarify that Jackie’s parents are not immigrants per se, but rather part of a stream of black migrants from Nova Scotia lured to Toronto by the promise of work and the city’s vibrant nightlife. However, their race and class means that their experience of Toronto is very much in keeping with that of the novel’s immigrant characters and so I consider them in the same light.

scene of which they form a part allow them to express agency over self-definition in the years following their arrival in Toronto.

However, within a few short years of moving to Toronto, the Paramount and the other clubs that sustain the Black sub-culture into which Jackie's parents have immersed themselves disappear one by one in rapid succession. "When the Paramount closed, Jackie's mother and father were lost. Everyone in Alexandra Park was lost. [...] All the glamour left their lives" (p. 178). With the loss of the Paramount and the lifestyle that went with it, the Bernards effectively lose their power of self-definition in the city. From this point onward, their lives become increasingly constrained and confined by structural forces that work in and through the space of Alexandra Park to trap them in a cycle of poverty and despair.

Lacking high-school diplomas, Jackie's parents both struggle in the labour market. Jackie's father has stints as a barber, but is unable to hold down a chair for long and cannot afford to open his own barbershop. He falls back on shady business deals and petty crime in order to support his family, spending time in jail for breaking and entering and receiving stolen goods. Jackie's mother, we learn, spent time working a "godawful job" at a comb factory, "packing one green comb, one yellow comb, one pink comb and one red comb in a box for four dollars and twenty five cents an hour" (p. 263). As matters get worse, they come to rely on social welfare checks, but these are insufficient to cover basic necessities. As a result of their struggles in the labour market, the marriage becomes stressed and they drink heavily. In contrast to

their early days in Toronto, when they danced the night away at the trendy Paramount and held high hopes for the future, they begin to frequent the Duke of Connaught, a bar that contrasts starkly with the glamorous Paramount:

[The Duke] smelled of wet carpet and beer spills, the walls were a dishevelled cousin of moss green, the lighting was sickly. No, the Duke depended on lost hopes, it depended on crushed spirits, it was not there to cheer you up, it was there to trawl in all the phlegm of your life. (p. 180)

If the socio-spatial milieu of the Paramount offered the possibility of belonging and self-definition, the Duke offers only a constant reminder of how they, the Bernards, were unable to make it in the city.

Above and beyond the limited opportunities available to uneducated Black migrants in Toronto, the novel posits the urban space in which they live – what Brand refers to as “the perilous stuff of Alexandra Park” (p. 260) – as the mechanism through which broader structural forces constrain and confine the lives of Jackie’s parents. Painting Alexandra Park as a desperate and desolate urban landscape dominated by concrete and asphalt, the narrator muses:

Why couldn’t *they* have planted a good tree anywhere here, why couldn’t *they* have laid out beds of plants and flowers, a forsythia bush or two, a grove of hostas, some forget-me-nots, some phlox, smoke trees now and then, mint bushes and rosemary, why had it been so hard for *the city* to come up with a bit of beauty. God, hope! The park wouldn’t have driven Jackie’s father and mother to drink like it had. And the dream of going back down east for good wouldn’t have faded and died right there on the narrow asphalt paths of Vanauley Way.

The narrow winding walkway, virtually empty in the daytime, scarred-looking, teemed with a ghostly, sometimes scary life at night. With one thought *they* could have made it beautiful, but perhaps *they* didn't think that poor people deserved beauty. (p. 260, emphasis added)

And further on:

Would it have killed *them* to splash a little colour on the buildings? Yes, it may have cost a little more in the first place to make the ceilings a little higher, the hallways a little less narrow, but in the last place think of the perspective: the general outlook might have been worth it. The sense of space might have triggered lighter emotions, less depressing thoughts, a sense of wellbeing. (p. 261, emphasis added)

It can be easily assumed that the “they” and “them” referred to in these passages are the political authorities who drive decision making in the city and who have imposed this desperate environment on low-income members of the Black community.

In effect, the novel describes a process of ghettoization in relation to Jackie's parents for whom a combination of race and class conspire to create limited labour market opportunities, the negative outcomes of which are partly produced and reinforced by the urban spaces they inhabit. During the present-day time frame of the novel, the urban lives of Jackie's parents are depicted as being entirely circumscribed by Alexandra Park, in which they are essentially cut off from the broader social and economic circuits of Toronto. With the closing of the Paramount and the collapse of the sub-culture it sustained, the Bernards lose what little agency they had over their social and economic identity in the city and become increasingly

defined by powerful structural forces beyond their control. Informal urban citizenship is denied them. Of course none of this is what they envisioned when they moved to Toronto, but, as the novel suggests, being young and hopeful is not enough if you are also Black and uneducated. In the end, their experience of Alexandra Park leaves them “wry”, “defeated” and “bitter” (p. 265).

Powerful structural forces that work in and through urban space also impose a socio-economic identity predicated upon ethnicity and race on Tuyen’s Vietnamese immigrant parents, Tuan and Cam Vu. Having said this, the case of the Vus differs markedly from those of the Barkers and Bernards insofar as Tuyen’s parents undergo a process of socio-economic ascension that has eluded the two Black couples. Moreover, unlike the others, Tuyen’s parents are not associated with a single immigrant space in the novel, but rather with a series of urban spaces along an immigrant trajectory that reveals increasing monetary wealth. Yet, as we shall see, despite these differences their life in the city is no less conditioned and constrained by forces beyond their control than those of Oku’s and Jackie’s parents.

The Vus arrive in Canada as refugees who became separated from one of their children, Quy, during their escape from Vietnam, an event that overshadows their high hopes of a new life in Canada. Tuyen’s mother (Cam) and father (Tuan) come to Canada with Vietnamese qualifications and work experience as a doctor and civil engineer respectively. However, upon their arrival in “the promised land” (p. 65), Cam and Tuan are not able to have their professional qualifications ratified by “the

authorities” (p. 65) despite repeated attempts to this effect. While Tuan seems to accept “the rebuff of Canadian officials and employers” (p. 114) and resigns himself to the fact that “he would never be allowed to build buildings” (p. 114), Cam persists in her attempts to obtain a Canadian medical licence:

She studied and studied, but always, four times, her English proficiency failed her. Never mind that she was probably only going to take care of Vietnamese patients who couldn't understand English-speaking doctors anyway; never mind that she could turn a breach, never mind. She too gave up finally. (p. 66)

With limited knowledge on how to engage the bureaucracy that governs her accreditation (p. 127), she has little choice but to do so. In essence, the novel depicts the Vus as powerless in relation to a system that in practice denies them equal opportunity in Toronto's labour market, and in so doing sets the parameters for their social and spatial lives in the city.²⁷

Unable to find employment in their respective fields, Tuan and Cam have little choice but to take on relatively menial jobs in order to support themselves and their growing number of children (which number four with the birth of Tuyen and her brother, Binh, in Toronto). Notably, the only place they find work is within the enclave economy of Chinatown amongst other Asian immigrants. Tuan spends two years unloading crates of produce for a Chinatown grocer while Cam works as a

²⁷ By positing the Vus as unable to benefit from their qualifications in Canada, Brand engages an ongoing debate in Canadian society on the barriers faced by immigrants – and especially immigrants from non-European Countries – in the Canadian labour market (see FCM, 2009; Weiner, 2008; Alboim, Finnie & Meng, 2005).

manicurist in a nearby salon. During this period the family lives in marginal accommodation across downtown Toronto – in a rooming house on Ulster street, in Alexandra Park and nearby Kensington Market. 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. 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. 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. (p. 66-7)

As this passage unequivocally conveys, the constraints faced by the Vus upon arrival in Canada force them into a particular urban space (Chinatown) and occupation (Vietnamese restaurant owners) that impose an urban identity on them based on racial and ethnic criteria above any other. As the passage further suggests, this identity is imposed in part 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 in the first place, a point I shall pick-up on in Chapter Four.

Ironically, once they have accepted their role as “Vietnamese Food” Tuyen's parents become financially successful. However, this financial success does not lead them to reconcile with the urban identity they had to adopt in order to become

wealthy. Quite to the contrary. With the money they earn from the restaurant, the Vus move to the new suburb of Richmond Hill, commuting daily to operate their restaurant in Chinatown. As described in the novel:

Richmond Hill is a sprawling suburb outside the city. It is one of those suburbs where immigrants go to get away from 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. (p. 54)

This is a powerful and unambiguous passage in which Cam and Tuan are depicted as being fundamentally uncomfortable with the imposed identity that forms the basis of their inclusion 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. Their only apparent outlet is unchecked consumption, what Brand describes as “a voracious getting” (p. 62).

Although they own a large house and operate a successful business, their day to day life is governed by an irrational sense of precariousness and fear of “officialdom”, which leads Tuan to stash money about the house (“just in case” [p. 61]) and Cam to repeatedly copy and laminate all of the documents attesting to their Canadian citizenship (p. 63). Despite all the hallmarks of a secure and stable existence, their actions and sentiments convey the belief that their destiny lies beyond their own control. Thus, however distant it is from Chinatown and their restaurant, Richmond Hill hardly constitutes an escape from the forces and spaces that have shaped the social identity of the Vus in Toronto. Instead, 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.

The limited information provided to the reader on the urban lives of Carla’s Jamaican father and stepmother – Derek and Nadine – is insufficient to build on the line of argument above. In contrast, the case of Carla’s deceased mother – Angie Chiarelli – is elaborated on at length in the novel and can be seen as adding a new dimension to Brand’s representation of how urban spaces have the potential to constrain lives in the city. While it is unclear from the text whether Angie was an immigrant per se or Canadian born, we do learn that she was raised in Toronto’s Little Italy within a ‘traditional’ Italian family. As a young woman she develops an urge to depart from the norms and expectations surrounding the ethno-cultural space of the family home and the neighbourhood in which she was raised:

Angie didn't want to be anyone ordinary in Little Italy. She was scared of the Saturday shopping and the Sunday churching and the Sunday dinners where her brothers' wives and her mother and she would busy themselves with cooking while her brothers and her father drank wine and scowled at the television or insulted each other about not knowing what real work was. She was scared of the screaming nieces and nephews and the inane talk about babies and wedding showers and houses in the new suburbs of Toronto. So Angie cut all that off with one flight into the most forbidden place on her family's earth. (p. 314)

This "flight" takes the form of an affair with a Black man – Derek – who frequents a club located above the Italian Espresso Bar where Angie works. Ignoring the "absolute proscription" underlying the racist insults directed at the Blacks upstairs by her Italian patrons, Angie falls in love with Derek and becomes pregnant with Carla. "Good or bad," writes Brand, "she had crossed a border" (p. 106). In doing so, Angie becomes the only one of 'the parents' in the novel who uses her agency to step beyond the boundaries of the particular ethnic spaces and identities that have been assigned them.²⁸ The repercussions of this choice lead to dire consequences that ultimately reveal just how limited this agency really is within Brand's Toronto.

As a result of her affair, Angie is disowned by her Italian family and effectively forced out of Little Italy. She ends up living in a "non descript, shabby apartment building" (p. 109) on Wellesley Avenue in St James Town. Derek, whose relationship with Angie was an extramarital affair, moves in with Angie for a brief period, but soon returns to his wife and teenage son. Over a period of several years

²⁸ Angie is the only one of the parents who is White, suggesting perhaps that within the narrative economy of the novel racial barriers are more difficult to overcome than ethnic ones.

Derek maintains an on-again off-again affair with Angie, leading to the birth of Carla's younger brother Jamal. Eventually the strained and occasionally violent relationship breaks down altogether, leaving Angie devastated and alone with her two young children. Having been marginalized from her family in Little Italy, Angie has no apparent social networks to support her through the emotionally and financially precarious state in which she finds herself. To compound her isolation, the city itself does not offer any solace to a woman that has refused to adopt the urban identity expected of her. During her everyday round of activities:

Angie was waiting for a look that said that she existed, that her life was understandable. [...] She tried to suggest it with her own eyes, to say, Hey how's it going today? I'm tired, what about you? But, cold stares came back at her, or what she thought was coldness. (p. 245)

Angie may have found Little Italy confining, but if nothing else it offered her a ready made basis of belonging in the city, both social and spatial. Outside the ethnic space of Little Italy, she is portrayed as being cast adrift. The apartment tower on St James Street – an “anonymous stack of concrete and glass” that seemed “built especially for disavowal” (p. 111) – offers nothing but a marginal existence. She eventually commits suicide by jumping from her unit when Carla was still a child. Reflecting on her mother's experience of Toronto decades after the fact, Carla suggests that Angie's agency was simply insufficient to keep her from being overwhelmed by powerful social forces beyond her control:

Angie was a border crosser, a wetback, a worker in the immigrant sweatshop they call this city. [...] Everybody thought she was a whore. She wasn't. She tried to step across the border of who she was and who she might be. *They* wouldn't let her. She didn't believe it herself so she stepped across into a whole other country. (p. 212 emphasis added)

The final line is a reference to her suicide.

Based on the discussion above, it is possible to conclude that the immigrant parents of the novels' four second-generation characters are all, in distinct yet ultimately comparable ways, represented as unable to claim informal urban citizenship in multicultural Toronto. As defined in Section I, informal urban citizenship implies agency over the terms in which individuals and the groups to which they belong are positioned within the broader social and economic spheres of the city. Brand's immigrant characters by and large lack such agency and are marginalized as a result. As we have seen, structural forces beyond their control condition their participation in the labour market and, consequently, confine them to particular places in the city associated with people of similar immigrant background. In turn, living in these spaces gives rise to an urban social identity that is predicated primarily on ethnic and racial membership rather than other criteria for belonging. The characters are thus pigeonholed into narrowly defined and ultimately marginal categories of identity that circumscribe their experience of the multicultural city. From this vantage point, suggests Tuyen of her parents, "either they could not see the larger space of commonality or it was denied them" (p. 125). Thus, urban space is not a strategic property through which Brand's immigrant characters contest their

right to the city, but rather a vehicle through which broader structural forces operate to define and confine their urban lives.

Unobserved borders: Brand's second-generation characters

The four principal second-generation characters of the novel – Tuyen, Oku, Carla and Jackie – all resist adopting the ethnically and racially predicated socio-spatial identities associated with their parents. They do so by distancing themselves from the neighbourhoods where they were raised and seeking out new spaces in which to carve out an alternate basis for urban identity and membership in the urban public. In this regard, they stand in contrast to their second-generation siblings and peers who seem comfortable to base their urban identities on the ethnic and racial spaces in which they were raised. Consequently, the novel represents Tuyen and her friends as being engaged in more than a standard and predictable disengagement with their immigrant backgrounds that might somehow be expected to occur among all second-generation individuals. Rather, they demonstrate a more fundamental refusal to be constrained by the same forces that have impinged upon the lives of their parents. Ultimately, the agency with which they resist externally imposed socio-spatial identities becomes the starting point from which they contest informal urban citizenship in multicultural Toronto by carving out new spaces of identity and belonging in the city.

Early in the novel we learn that the four main characters became friends in high-school, drawn together in part by their common experience as children of immigrant parents. As teenagers, all four are described as being unable 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” (p. 47). Although all of them are described as having felt the same way, Tuyen is clearly the most rebellious. As a youth she rails against all things Vietnamese, refusing to speak the language, cultivating a purposeful dislike for the food, and resisting her parents’ “admittedly ambivalent efforts to enforce Vietnamese rules” (p. 125). In a reflective moment, Tuyen wonders:

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. (p. 69)

There is little ambivalence in Tuyen’s feelings. She 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. This elicits wild protestations and dire predictions from her parents, who continue to solicit her to return home even though it has been several years since she left. 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' and how it governs every aspect of their life in Toronto.

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 in Chinatown – stands in marked contrast to her siblings. Her older sisters, Lam and Ai, continue to live at home, their position in the family defined by cultural factors as well as the traumatic loss of Quy during the family's flight from Vietnam:

[Lam and Ai] were born in the old country and understood their positions before Quy's loss, understood as a matter of culture; and surely if they had harboured any hopes of changing that, of living out their fantasies of the North American teenage rebellion, with Rolling Stones concerts and independence and free sex, Quy's loss squelched those hopes. (p. 125)

Lam and Ai seem to have internalized the "duty", "obligation", "honour", and "vise-like grip of emotional debt" (p. 61) exacted by their parents' Vietnamese cultural values, all of which Tuyen rejects and seeks to escape.

Perhaps a more interesting comparison is between Tuyen and her brother, Binh, who, like her, was born 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" (p. 157). Despite this, Tuyen and Binh react to

these geographies and the experiences they gave rise to in fundamentally different ways:

Today he [Binh] still lived at home devotedly. In fact he, unlike Tuyen, had no feelings of restriction at home or urges to find himself. *He was himself* under the adoring eyes of his father and mother and the watchful know of his two older sisters. (p. 124, emphasis added)

Binh defines his 'self' partly in relation to the ethno-cultural space of the family home 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 (p. 122-3). Unlike Tuyen, Binh uses the normative cultural space of the family home strategically, benefiting as a result. The same can be said for the family restaurant, which Binh uses 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 in Toronto, whereas the other mobilizes it to his own advantage.

A similar contrast between siblings is found in the case of Carla and her younger brother Jamal. Following their mother's suicide, the two were raised by Derek and his wife Nadine, both of whom are Jamaican immigrants. Like Tuyen, Carla demonstrates no form of affinity with the culture of her Jamaican father and step-mother. On her weekly trip to the market with Nadine, Carla,

was uneasy among the pawpaws, soursops, plantains, goat, fish, gizadas, and cans of ackees. 'Your father likes this,' Nadine would croon. [...] Carla despised the smell of the stores that carried dried cod and fresh thyme and mangoes. Her ears registered discomfort at the sound of accented voices pausing in self-derision, in boastfulness, or in religious certainty. She hated this language that she made herself unheard, unthink and undream. She never actually learned it except to understand her father, Nadine, and their friends, and to translate it to her teachers and anyone official. She had been a translator herself, knowing the language the way a translator whose first tongue is another language knows. She did not live in it. She considered her father's customs foreign, embarrassing oddities that she would try to distance herself from in public. (p. 131)

As the quote conveys, Carla not only finds the everyday aspects of Jamaican culture in Toronto unappealing, but she also considers them "foreign" to who she is or wishes to become. Combined with her deep-seated hatred for her father, whom she blames for her mother's suicide, this leads Carla to leave home permanently, precisely as Tuyen did, upon coming of age.

Although Jamal dislikes his father as much as Carla does, instead of distancing himself from his Jamaican background, he associates with other Black youth of Jamaican origin that are part of a violent street culture. Although he was raised half way across the city, Jamal gravitates towards “The Jungle”, the common moniker given to the low-income neighbourhood of Lawrence Heights, which is characterized by large tracts of short-term public housing populated by a large and youthful demographic of black Caribbean and African immigrants (CBC, 2009).²⁹ It has a widespread reputation for poverty, drugs and gang violence. Here, in a space that permits him to do so, Jamal fosters an ethnically and racially based identity for himself as a Black Jamaican ‘gangster’. He even goes as far as to speak with a Jamaican accent in order to add authenticity to his chosen identity and “to assume badness” (p. 30) on the street. By adopting this identity, Jamal becomes vulnerable to what the novel represents as an inherently racist police force and judicial system (p. 30-37). The police and judiciary effectively punish his youthful decision to insert himself into the underworld of ‘The Jungle’ by contributing to the validation and racialization of his identity during their growing number of encounters with him – a sort of negative feedback loop that quickly forecloses any initial agency he might have had over the course of his life in the city. Eventually, he ends up imprisoned in the Mimico Correctional facility. As Carla tells him during one of her visits, he has essentially become a victim of his own making: “How could you let other people handle you like that and run your life every minute of the day, Jamal?” (p. 30). Once

²⁹ There is some controversy as to the origin of this name. I have heard its provenance attributed variously to a sister neighbourhood in East Kingston, Jamaica, also called the Jungle, to John Huston’s film noir *The Asphalt Jungle* and even to the rather maze-like layout of the neighbourhood itself.

again, the novel establishes a stark contrast between second-generation siblings. Jamal chooses to identify himself with a narrowly defined, ethnically and racially based subculture and, as a result, loses his agency at the hands of a powerful official apparatus that is only too eager to discipline him. Taking her mother as an example, Carla resists identification according to such narrow criteria of belonging and, as we shall see below, retains agency over her urban life and identity.

Oku has the most nuanced and internally conflicted relationship with the ethno-racial basis of his familial identity and the urban space that underscores it in the novel. He clearly finds the socio-spatial identity of his parents – which is shaped by their life in Little Jamaica – as limited and backward looking. However, having grown up in the neighbourhood, Oku has close ties with other Black youths in the area and the possibility of self-definition in relation to the Black youth culture of the neighbourhood and ‘The Jungle’ nearby, is an ever present possibility. Yet, despite holding some allure to him, he cannot seem to internalize as his own the way in which his friends present themselves to the world:

[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. Which man wouldn't want to be thought

of as dangerous? Yet who wanted to have that mantle drawn around his shoulders all the time? Some, but you couldn't crack into the full register of yourself. (p. 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 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” (p. 166), Oku chooses to back out of his arrangement with Kwesi 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” (p. 166). This metaphorical “prison” can be seen as referring to the urban identity his peers have constructed for themselves as well as the urban spaces – most notably the ‘jungle’ – from which it stems and in which it is contained. 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 Jamal's life. 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 and Jamal, 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. (p. 165)

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

An analysis of Jackie's case supports the line of argument above. In relation to her, suffice it to say that although she remains close to her parents in Alexandra Park, she looks beyond the racial ghetto of her youth for a site of identity formation:

Jackie hadn't left Alexandra Park. She owed a loyalty to her mother and father. That faithfulness didn't mean that she wanted to have it burn her as it had them. (p. 165)

It is even suggested that she spurns Oku's amorous advances because he looks too much like one of those "burned-out" (p. 165) Black youth from Alexandra Park. Instead she dates a German guitarist, Reiner, whose Whiteness makes him "someone in control and certainly not threatened" (p. 176). In Oku's view dating a "White boy" (p. 256) is a strategy Jackie uses to take control over her life that her parents and others in Alexandra Park have lost.

In sum, Brand's main second-generation characters all refuse to be assigned an urban identity based on narrow ethnic and racial criteria, as occurred in the case of their respective parents. It is important to clarify that while ethnicity seems to be dismissed outright as a basis of identification by all four characters, they remain acutely aware of how their racial membership is unavoidably central to shaping their identity in the city. Nevertheless, they refuse to be defined primarily according to race. Their resistance is inherently spatial, since it is enacted largely by distancing themselves from the immigrant spaces to which their parents have been confined by structural forces that have assigned them a particular role in the city, one that can be regarded as congruent with their ethnic and racial background. Tuyen and her friends decline to frame their urban lives in relation to the social networks and economic opportunities available to them within these spaces. In so doing they take an important step toward resisting socio-spatial marginalization and being denied informal urban citizenship by the same forces that have conditioned the lives of their parents. However, this resistance remains necessarily partial and incomplete until they can generate an urban identity of their own upon which to claim the right to the city. As we shall see in the next sub-section, the inhabitation of urban space plays a central role in the process through which this new and highly political identity takes shape.

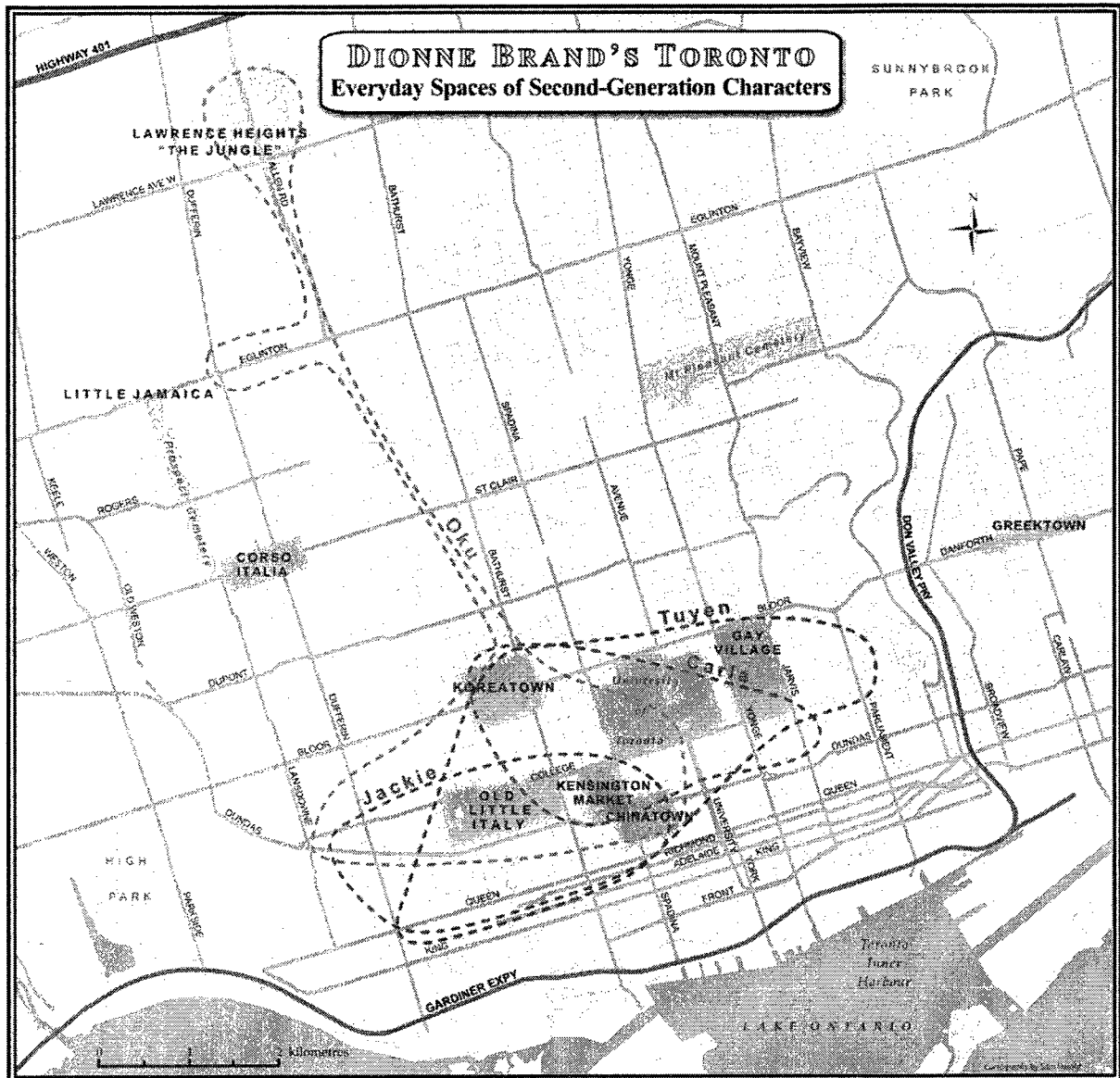
New spaces, new identities

Unwilling to allow the ethnic and racially marked spaces in which they were raised to determine their position in the social and economic world of the city, Brand's four main characters are faced with the need to seek out alternative spaces of identity formation. As the following passage suggests, from a young age 'the city' itself and their encounter with it becomes the 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. (p. 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 daily engagement with specific urban spaces – their geographies of everyday life in the city – that their individual 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 the internal boundaries – at once social and spatial – that circumscribe the urban lives of their parents and peers. The everyday geographies of the main characters are firmly centred on a variety of spaces across Toronto's downtown (see Map 2), which for all

four characters constitutes a chosen alternative to the neighbourhoods in which they were raised. Their experience of downtown Toronto is shaped in large measure by the propinquity of various forms of social difference. Indeed, Brand represents downtown Toronto as a physical space where the city's social diversity – ethnic, racial, cultural, sexual and otherwise – meets and intersects. It is precisely through an engagement with this socio-spatial heterogeneity 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 2: The geographies associated with the second-generation characters in Dionne Brand's novel *What We All Long For* (as extrapolated from places mentioned in relation to each character in the text). The everyday geographies of all characters are firmly centred on downtown Toronto.

As previously noted, shortly after coming of age, Tuyen moved out of the family home and away from Richmond Hill. She did so despite the protestations of her mother and father, from whose cultural viewpoint it is unthinkable that a daughter could create a life for herself independently from the family unit or should even want to in the first place. Tuyen's chosen alternative to Richmond Hill is a run-down apartment on College Street in downtown Toronto.³⁰ As Brand writes, "[Tuyen] wanted to be downtown, in the heat of it" (p. 61). "It" in this case is a part of Toronto where she can immerse herself amidst the city's "unlimited permutations of existence" (p. 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" (p. 142). Wandering the streets for inspiration and content for her artwork, she comes up against this heterogeneity on a daily basis. The city's "polyphonic murmuring" (p. 149) surrounds her, mixing in the air to form "a new kind of vocabulary" (p. 155). 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" (p. 155). Amidst the diversity of downtown Toronto, Tuyen has an opportunity to explore her 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.

³⁰ Ironically, College Street is one of the places where Tuyen's family lived in poverty during the years immediately following their move to Canada. Thus, there is an inevitable sense that she is 'starting over' – redefining her urban self from the point of origin – albeit with an agency that stands in contrast to the afore-mentioned structural constraints that gave her parents little choice but to live in near slum conditions downtown.

On no occasion is this more evident than in Tuyen's engagement with the festivities surrounding the Korea/Japan World Cup, with which Brand coincides the time frame of the novel. Although she has no evident interest in soccer per se, Tuyen is drawn to the various national and cultural spaces where games are being watched and victories celebrated:

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. (p. 204)

As the quote suggests, Tuyen's attraction to the World Cup stems partly from her gregarious nature, her magnetic attraction to a good party. However, the World Cup is also an opportunity for Tuyen to immerse herself in the sort of diversity that attracted her to downtown Toronto in the first place. Indeed, her experience of the tournament becomes a symbolic amplification of the constant encounter with difference that makes up her everyday life in downtown Toronto. In both cases, the engagement with different forms of identity and the spaces associated with them allows Tuyen to explore her subjectivity beyond the rigid ethnic and racial parameters of her family's identity in the city.

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 identity formation. Jackie's chosen way out of the stagnation and despair the novel attributes to Alexandra Park is to open a small clothing store on Queen Street West, "on the border where Toronto's trendy met Toronto's seedy" (p. 99).³¹ On his part, Oku gravitates toward Kensington Market in his attempt to distance himself from Little Jamaica and Lawrence Heights. I would argue that Brand's choice to connect her main characters with Queen Street West and Kensington Market is significant, given their strong association with urban diversity in Toronto.

Queen Street West has a long standing reputation as socially and culturally avant-garde and is informally known as Toronto's SoHo. While the original portion of the street that gave rise to this reputation has since become transformed into the headquarters of major cultural industries,³² West Queen Street West (where Jackie's store is located) retains some of the 'indy' outlets that act as focal points for urban sub-cultures and social movements. Although for somewhat different reasons, Kensington Market has also acquired a reputation as a site of urban diversity *par excellence*. Originally a Jewish neighbourhood, since the post-WWII period Kensington Market has been transformed by the successive arrival of

³¹ Over the past twenty years Queen Street West has become a focal point for Canadian broadcasting, music, fashion and the visual arts. Although only blocks away from each other, Queen Street West is a world apart from (what Brand represents as) the racial ghetto of Alexandra Park.

³² It is important to note that both (West) Queen Street West and Kensington Market are sites of struggle where dominant ideologies (about race, ethnicity and capitalism) are expressed and contested. Brand's representation of these spaces and the action that occurs there play into this struggle, a point to which I shall return in the following section of the chapter.

European, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, East Indian, South Asian, Latin American and African immigrants. As the Parks Canada Agency noted at the time of designating Kensington Market a National Historic Site in 2006:

Kensington Market is a microcosm of Canada's ethnic mosaic, where many different ethnocultural communities, searching for an affordable home, have each added to the market's layers of cultural variety, maintained a dynamic, culturally diverse market, and contributed to a vibrant street life. Kensington Market has been a neighborhood of inclusiveness, adding layers of cultural richness and variety with each successive wave of immigration to Toronto over the past century. It is a place that reflects important historical themes in Canada relating to urban migration and settlement patterns, the development of small-scale businesses and entrepreneurs as a fundamental part of Canada's economic growth, the formation of cultural and religious identity through community organizations, and the expression of social and cultural history through a specific vernacular architecture that is characteristic of the neighbourhood. (Parks Canada, 2006)

Kensington Market, then, can be seen as a symbolic site of urban diversity, a place where multiple cultural, ethnic and racial identities interact and intersect. A similar case could be made for West Queen Street West, only in relation to its concentration of urban sub-cultures. For Jackie (who also pops up in Kensington Market) and Oku (who also frequently visits West Queen Street West) these spaces stand in contrast to what Brand represents as the inward looking, racialized neighbourhoods of Alexandra Park and Little Jamaica. Their new, downtown geographies allow them to explore identity outside the parameters of these marginal, immigrant pockets and, ultimately, begin to formulate a new basis for social identity and positioning in the city.

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 both live and where Jackie and Oku are frequent visitors. As a space of social interaction between Brand's second-generation characters, the apartment plays an important role in the formation of their collective urban identities. When the four characters (and the minor characters that form their extended social circle 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, at one point in the narrative (p. 129-136) 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 multicultural crew of graffiti artists. Like the 'fusion' meal Oku is preparing, the social circle present is characterized by a diversity of backgrounds and influences. 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 experiences in spaces associated with their own ethnicity or race in the city. A new constituency is thus forged in the apartment, one that simultaneously draws upon and transcends the diversity of members.

Brand's representation of how the spatial encounter with difference contributes to the constitution of an emerging urban identity among her second-generation characters is most clearly explicated in a chapter that can also be considered the

climax of the novel. At the start of chapter sixteen (p. 203-214), Tuyen hears raucous celebrations erupt on the streets of Korea Town following Korea's victory over Italy in the early knockout stages of the 2002 World Cup. She leaves her apartment and runs up Bathurst Street to join in the revelling taking place a few short blocks away. In the pouring rain amidst the celebrating masses, "elated, infected by mood on the street" (p. 204), she happens upon an equally exhilarated Oku who leads her to a nearby street corner where they meet up with "the usually subdued Carla waving a Korean flag and singing 'Oh, Pil-seung Korea'" (p. 209). The three remain immersed in the celebrations before eventually retreating to a nearby bar to escape the rain and unwind from their euphoric experience. The ease and evident elation with which they cross ethnic and national boundaries to participate in this unabashed outburst of Korean identity at once prefigures and illustrates the highly significant portion of text that follows. Carla, recalling her mother's departure from Little Italy, refers to her as a "border crosser", after which a pregnant narrative reflection fills the lull in character dialogue:

[In the bar] They sat drinking and feeling, looking at the rain still falling outside and listening to the blare of horns and the clatter of forks and dishes around them. As disturbing as all they were living was, they felt alive. More alive, they thought, than most people around them. They believed in it, this living. Its raw openness. 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 front 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. Carla had said it all [...] about all of them. Trying to step across borders of who they were. But they were not merely trying. They were, in fact, borderless. (p. 212-3)

In this passage Brand comes the closest to explicitly stating what the book otherwise illustrates through its depiction of the everyday lives of Tuyen and her friends. That is, for these characters, identity and belonging are heavily shaped by spatial practices that lead to encounters that cross-cut multiple forms of difference in the city.

In terms of the relationship between urban space, identity and social positioning in the city, the contrast between generations in Brand's novel is considerable. For the immigrant characters, powerful forces which they lack the agency to overcome, confine their life in the city to bounded spaces associated with their migrant background. These spaces shape the production of marginal urban identities that are based primarily on static criteria of ethnicity and race, which form their primary site of collective belonging in the multicultural city. For Brand's second-generation characters, the basis for identification and social positioning does not centre primarily on ethnic or racial membership, nor for that matter on other 'traditional' categories of affiliation such as nationality, gender, sexuality and so forth. Instead, identity amongst these characters is far more fluid and derived from the (inherently spatial) experience of living amidst the many forms of social and cultural difference co-present in the multicultural city. As Dobson (2006) notes in her analysis of *What*

We All Long For, Brand's second-generation characters "build their communities across borders, rhyomatically connecting to each other with out a predetermined logic" (p. 100). 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.

Based on my analysis, one might be forgiven for thinking that Brand offers her readership a rather one dimensional, even starry eyed perspective on cultural hybridity among second generations, one that uncritically exalts its emancipatory potential. Such critics might point out that by representing the identities of her second-generation characters in the way she does, Brand not only reifies the ethnic and racial identities associated with their parents, but also creates a new category of identity to contend with that has its own exclusionary borders and boundaries (see critiques on hybridity by: K. Mitchell, 2005; McEwan, 2004; Pratt, 1999). This is certainly a cogent argument, particularly if one considers the binary opposition that Brand creates between her second-generations characters and White Anglophone Torontonians, a point that I will discuss at the start of the following chapter. However, as I also discuss in Chapter Four, Brand's representation can be understood as a political intervention that targets what she and others depict as a socio-economic and discursive urban context where ethnic and racial identities are tied to disadvantage and treated as categories of essential difference. As I maintained in the Introduction, the political potential of hybrid identities is not universal and inevitable, but rather linked to the particular contexts from which they

emerge and to which they respond. As I try to show in the following chapter, Brand's representation is not to be uncritically lauded, but rather its merits should be regarded contextually.

At the same time, it is important to point out that relative to all four of Brand's second-generation characters, the spatial negotiation of hybrid identities offers only a starting point for defining their terms of membership in the urban public. That is to say, within the narrative, the hybrid identities of the main characters do not keep them from experiencing discrimination nor somehow allow them to magically circumvent the difficulties of carving out a livelihood in the city. Indeed, while all four have managed (at least so far) to hold at bay the structural forces and experiences of officialdom that have shaped the lives of their parents, none of them is finding the transition to adulthood and the concomitant need to provide for themselves particularly easy. Oku has dropped out of university and, by the end of the novel, resigns himself to having to work for his dad in construction, at least in the short term. Tuyen's art pays little and she depends on cash handouts from her parents passed on through her brother. As a bike courier, Carla finds herself on the cusp of being fired due to absenteeism and general disinterest. Only Jackie seems to have settled on an occupation that both matches her interests and provides income, but it is far from sure whether her clothing boutique, located beyond the established retail strip of Queen Street West, will become an established concern. Thus, Brand does not present an overly deterministic view of hybridity as a magic bullet, but rather

offers it only as a starting point for youthful characters contesting their place, literally and figuratively, in the multicultural city.

Having considered how the novel's second-generation characters renegotiate the relationship between urban space and identity associated with their parents, in the next chapter I explore how the novel represents their emergent identity as a basis for contesting informal urban citizenship within multicultural Toronto. Based on this discussion, I go on to outline how the novel constitutes a pertinent intervention into ongoing debates about power, identity and social inclusion within an urban and national environment shaped by a much debated and critiqued discourse of multiculturalism.

CHAPTER 4

Representing informal urban citizenship in Toronto: Toward a new multicultural imaginary

In the previous chapter, I explored how the relationship between urban space and identity is fundamentally reconfigured between generations in *What We All Long For*. I also did an initial assessment of the implications of this to the novel's representation of informal urban citizenship in Toronto. We saw how powerful structural forces circumscribe the socio-spatial and economic lives of Brand's immigrant characters, effectively denying them agency over their terms of membership in the urban public. Brand's second-generation characters were shown to engage in socio-spatial practices that simultaneously resist the marginalization experienced by their parents and define their own basis for inclusion in the urban public. The present chapter builds on the ground work done in the previous one by engaging in a more contextualized discussion of the spatial identity politics of informal urban citizenship represented in Brand's novel.

To begin with, I argue that the novel encourages its readership to apprehend the emerging basis for informal urban citizenship negotiated by Tuyen and her friends as a challenge to the normative structures of power in contemporary multicultural Toronto. This, in turn, leads me to consider how Brand's representations acquire particular meaning and relevance within broader debates about the politics of

multiculturalism in Canada. Indeed, I suggest that these debates can be considered a key inter-text for this novel. I conclude the chapter and my analysis of *What We All Long For* by outlining the important contribution it makes to the geographical imagination of informal urban citizenship within the broader, heavily politicized, context of multicultural Toronto.

Resisting the normative order

Much in the same way as they rejected the urban identities that circumscribe the lives of their parents in Toronto, from a young age, Tuyen, Oku, Carla and Jackie exhibit a youthful refusal to define themselves according to (what they perceive as) the norm:

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. (p. 47)

As this passage conveys, from early on in their lives Brand's characters consider themselves to be *a priori* excluded from mainstream belonging by virtue of their race. They respond to this not by actively seeking inclusion (as their parents encourage them to do), but rather by fundamentally rejecting it as a basis for social identification. The mainstream they so vehemently reject is only obliquely described by Brand, although it is evident that she is referring to Toronto's

established, politically and economically dominant population of British origin (a group that can be expanded to include White, Anglophone individuals of other European background). This is a group that Day (2000) refers to as the 'canonical self of Canada'.³³

Characters belonging to this charter group are conspicuously absent from the narrative. Only occasional passing references, often disparaging in tone, serve to remind the reader of the city's charter group, whose members are generally referred to only as "they" and "them" or in otherwise abstracted terms.³⁴ Having said this, the presence and influence of this group is palpably, if nonetheless implicitly, felt throughout the novel as the powerful entity behind the structural forces that impinge upon the lives of the novel's immigrant characters and which the second-generation characters must contest in order to claim informal urban citizenship. In assigning White, Anglophone Torontonians the role of powerful 'Others', Brand aligns the narrative with social divisions that transcend the novel. As Siemieatycki et al (2003) argue, "the socio-economic polarization of Toronto can be characterized with little oversimplification, as a division between Toronto's White European-origin population and non-White population from every other continent. [...] Toronto today appears to have its own litmus (colour) test of advantage and disadvantage" (p. 419). This claim is supported by other recent scholarship that points to growing

³³ See also Mackey (2002) and Hier and Bolaria (2006) for references to the dominance of this group in Canada.

³⁴ For example, on hearing a radio announcer confess that he didn't know Toronto had a Koreatown, Tuyen's reaction is scathing: "Asshole, she thought, you wouldn't. You fucker's live as if we don't live here" (p. 203-4).

socio-economic and spatial polarization along racial lines (most notably between White and non-White groups) in Toronto (see FCM, 2009; Weiner, 2008; Stein, 2007; Hulchanski, 2007; Walks and Bourne, 2006).³⁵ Thus Brand defines her characters, immigrant and second-generation alike, partly in contrast to what she and others have identified as Toronto's dominant charter group.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the immigrant characters in the novel are effectively denied the possibility of integrating with this charter group. However, as the quotation above conveys, the second-generation characters have the option to integrate, at least partially, but choose not to. As a result, the charter group becomes positioned as a powerful 'Other' whose normative influence not only needs to be resisted, but also countered through the production of an alternate urban identity and basis for collective belonging in the city. Going one step further, one might argue that by appropriating downtown Toronto as a space of identity formation, Brand's second-generation characters effectively challenge the dominance of the charter group in Toronto. Indeed, Brand's choice of downtown Toronto as the site of identity formation is significant because it metaphorically implies a movement from the margins to the centre with respect to agency over social positioning in the city. Moreover, it represents a symbolic recovery of downtown Toronto in the name of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial constituency at a time when scholars are pointing to a growing concentration of affluent, White Torontonians in the downtown area (see Hulchanski, 2007). Seen in this way, the

³⁵ In this regard, Toronto reflects a national polarization between newcomer/immigrant groups and multi-generational Canadians.

emergent urban identity of the novel's main characters takes on an overt spatial politics, a means through which they claim their 'right to the city' – with all that this implies – from the powerful constituency that denied it to their immigrant parents.

In addition to the examples considered in the previous chapter, the present argument is supported by several key passages from the novel in which Brand draws attention to the spatial politics of her second-generation characters. For example, in the following passage the narrator reflects on how these politics are symbolically captured in the graffiti painted across downtown Toronto by Kumaran's crew (who were introduced in Chapter Three):

[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. (p. 134-5, emphasis added)

In this passage, the "radical" affront the graffiti poses to the "anglicized city" is offered as a visual marker of the otherwise intangible presence of Brand's second-generation characters in Toronto. The fact that the "dangerous dreams" of the constituency represented by the graffiti are juxtaposed with a "dying poetics" suggests a fundamental challenge being posed to the normative power exerted by the city's charter group.

A second example can be drawn from a passage that describes Carla riding her bicycle into Toronto from the outlying suburb of Etobicoke following a visit to her brother Jamal at the Mimico Correctional Institute. Arguably one of the most powerful and evocative passages in the novel, it is worth quoting in full before proceeding with my analysis:

Gearing up on her bicycle she left the dreariness of it [Mimico] behind, heading down town. When she made the intersection at Runnymede, the glow was still on her body searing and damp. The afternoon light was sharp for spring. The sun coming west was dead angled at her head as she rode east, chipping between cars, crazily challenging red lights. The city was vivid. Each billboard screeching happiness and excitement. The cars, the crowds intense in the this-and-that of commerce, of buy this, get that, the minutiae of transient wants and needs. As fast as she was riding, she could still make out the particularity of each object or person she saw, so acute this searing light around her, tingling her skin. Could anyone see here? Drenched in lightning?

She hurtled through the upscale region of High Park, the old British-style houses. The people who must inhabit these with their neat lives made her sicker to her stomach than usual because she'd just left her brother. The cute expensive stores, the carapace of wealth, seemed unaffected by her lit body. The handlebars of the bike were like her own bone, and like her bones she bent the brace toward the park itself. Perhaps there she might burn off the pace of her legs up the inclines and through the trees. But she was out of the park before she knew it. The trees held nothing. The manicured circle of flowers, the false oasis of the park, only made her sicker. Before long she was out on Bloor Street again, speeding toward the centre of the city, flinging herself through the lights at Keele and bending southward toward the lake; the bellowing horn and pneumatic break of an eighteen wheeler flinched her sinuous back, but she didn't stop for the trucker yelling curses at her. She left the drama of the shocked driver and skewered traffic behind. If she could stop, she would have, but she was light and light moves.

Oku had lent her Dizzy Gillespie's "Take it as It Comes." The Zephyres of trumpets and saxophones streamed into her at Dundas Street. Out of the horns she sensed the lake and sped down to

Roncesvalles. Ordinarily the bike would bump across streetcar lines, but today she didn't feel them, she was slipping through the city on light. She rode along the shore, feeling translucent. The sun was on the lake, turning its usual muddiness to a pearly blue stretching south and wide. Carla raised her back from its hunch, felt a small hopeful breeze. (p. 28-30)

There are several aspects of Carla's dramatic ride that cause it to function as an expanded metaphor for the spatial identity politics under consideration. Deeply angered, both at her brother and what she considers to be the racist system that incarcerated him, Carla sets off on an aggressive ride in which she charts a course of her own choosing through the city. The agency with which she does so constitutes a challenge to the city's dominant group, whose values are reflected in the upscale White neighbourhood of High Park through which she rides. While this enclave remains "unaffected" by her passage, the same cannot be said of downtown where her arrival causes real and symbolic chaos to the order of life in the city. Her ride literally and metaphorically disrupts the 'centre', highlighting the transformation she and her friends bring to the social order of the city through their appropriation of downtown as a site of self-definition. The description of Carla as "light", which elsewhere in the novel is conflated with "heterogeneity" (p. 142), is also significant, suggesting that it is the fluid quality of her urban identity that puts her in a position to challenge the city's normative order. It is precisely by refusing to conform to this order and establishing instead an alternative basis for insertion into the social world of the city that the second generation-characters in the novel claim informal urban citizenship in Toronto.

Multicultural discourse and the politics of identity in Canada

Based on the discussion in the previous sub-section, we can say that Brand frames her novel in relation to a broader politics of ethnic and racial pluralism in Toronto. In doing so, she almost inevitably inserts the novel into ongoing discussions about Canadian multiculturalism and its underlying relationships and structures of power. Indeed, I would argue that the often heated debates concerning multicultural discourse in Canada form an implicit inter-text for the novel, an ancillary set of narratives in relation to which Brand's representation of socio-spatial identities in contemporary Toronto takes on added meaning and relevance. Consequently, in this sub-section of the chapter, I engage with the literature on the politics of multicultural discourse with a view to setting up a subsequent appraisal of the contribution Brand's novel makes to ongoing debates. To be clear, it is not my objective to offer a multi-faceted critical summary of the voluminous writing on the subject, but rather to isolate and discuss a line of argument that is of particular relevance to my reading of the novel. My ultimate objective here is to consider how Brand's representation of informal urban citizenship amongst second-generation youth in Toronto both critiques and re-imagines identity and social relations in a city where cultural pluralism is informed by multicultural discourse. By pursuing this line of discussion, I am developing my earlier contention that literary representations have the potential to shape and reshape the geographical and sociological imaginary of urban citizenship in multicultural cities such as Toronto.

Multiculturalism is a political philosophy that recognizes the existence of distinct cultural groups – generally defined by ethnicity, religion and/or language – within a given citizenry and establishes their right to remain culturally distinct from the majority group. This philosophical standpoint generally translates into policies that offer “external protection” to minority groups in order to counter assimilation pressures. External protection can range from financial support and legal protection for practices associated with a particular group through to special representation rights in government and even limited forms of self-government (Baubock, 2006; Kymlicka, 2002; Jackson, 2000b). Canada became the world’s first nation to formally adopt multiculturalism as official government policy in 1971, later cementing it in legislation with the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* of 1988. According to the Federal Government of Canada:

Canadian multiculturalism is fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open to, and accepting of, diverse cultures. The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, and discourages ghettoization, hatred, discrimination and violence. (Government of Canada, 2007, in Ley, 2007)

In the Canadian context, multiculturalism takes the form of specific programs that fund cultural events and organizations, policies and laws aimed at countering racism and promoting institutional integration and civic participation, a broader guideline intended to inform the activities of government and, finally, an overarching social

discourse in relation to which identity, belonging and citizenship are shaped and reshaped. While there is an obvious overlap in all of these mutations of multiculturalism, my main focus here is on the latter or discursive dimension of the term.

Following a seminal essay by Charles Taylor (1994), many analysts consider multiculturalism to constitute a progressive 'politics of recognition' that valorizes cultural pluralism in Canada and advances the ideal of social justice for all citizens (Kymlicka, 2007a, 1998, 1995; Howard-Hassmann, 2006 [1999]; Fleras & Elliot, 2002). Generally speaking, for such analysts, multiculturalism represents a fundamental departure from the exclusionary and racist policies through which the Canadian state engaged immigrants and minorities throughout much of its history. According to Kymlicka (2003), Canada's foremost scholar on the subject, multiculturalism: 1) repudiates the historical ideal of the nation state as the territory of a single group, 2) replaces assimilationist or exclusionary nation-building projects with a politics of accommodation, and 3) acknowledges historical injustices to cultural minorities and attempts to atone for them in the present. The adoption of multiculturalism in Canada, claims Kymlicka (2007a), means that "the historically dominant British population in Canada [...] has been required to renounce fantasies of racial superiority, to relinquish claims to exclusive ownership of the state and abandon attempts to fashion public institutions solely in its own White Christian image" (p. 63). A similar perspective is advanced by Ley (2007, 2005) and Juteau et al (1998), who argue that multiculturalism has contributed to the creation of a

more just and inclusive society in Canada in which minority status is a basis for national belonging and institutional participation rather than marginalization. This being said, both authors acknowledge that multiculturalism in Canada should be regarded as an ongoing project rather than a finished product and that challenges, old and new, must still be overcome.

While Kymlicka (2007a) and others maintain that multiculturalism (and the specific policies to which it has given rise) are “inspired by legitimate liberal-democratic goals” (p. 78), others are far more sceptical. For the sceptics, multiculturalism is not regarded as a visionary attempt to usher in a more egalitarian Canada, but rather a response to the charged political environment of the time at which it was instituted as domestic policy. Indeed, various analysts have suggested that the adoption of multiculturalism can be regarded as: 1) a means of diffusing the legitimacy of Quebec’s separatist movement (not to mention movements seeking Aboriginal autonomy) by reducing Francophone Quebecers to another among many cultural groups that comprise Canada’s newly recognized multi-culture;³⁶ 2) a rather straightforward attempt by the Liberal Party to claim the ‘ethnic’ vote at a time when shifts in immigration policy were creating an ever more ethno-racially diverse population; and/or 3) a more general move by a government representative of a dominant (White Anglo-European) group to create a discursive framework for regulating growing ethno-racial difference while masking the power relations upon which the nation’s social relations are historically constructed (Mackey, 2002;

³⁶ Or at least a way of counterbalancing the recognition given to Franco-Quebec by the adoption of official bilingualism.

Bissoondath, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000). Notwithstanding, the intent behind the original adoption of multiculturalism – if indeed there was a well-defined objective behind it (see Wood and Gilbert, 2005) – multiculturalism as both policy and public discourse has become a focal point for debates over ethno-cultural and race relations in Canada. As Juteau (1998) notes, multiculturalism today can be “conceived as a field of struggle opposing various forces and actors, as a site of power relations between differentiated and hierarchized groups which are constituted into ethnic and/or national collectivities” (p. 96). Below, I focus on a single strand of debate concerning the politics of multicultural discourse in Canada, one that is of particular relevance to my reading of *What We All Long For*.

The primary point on which I wish to focus is the widespread argument that multiculturalism – in Canada and as a model more generally – affords primacy to ethnic and racial criteria in the assignation of individual and group identities. Put differently, multiculturalism compartmentalizes individuals and groups according to ethnic origin and racial groups, relegating in the process other bases of identification – whether social class, political ideology, lifestyle preferences, education levels, etc. – to secondary status. This not only applies to immigrants per se, but also extends to second-generation individuals (and even beyond), who continue to be defined within the parameters of multicultural discourse by their supposed ethno-racial ancestry. Multicultural discourse, then, is said to essentialize and reify minority identities according to neatly bounded categories of group membership that supposedly reflect a shared cultural perspective on social and political life

(Baubcock, 2006; Hier & Bolaria, 2006; Goonewardena & Kipfer, 2005; Chanady, 2004; Bissoondath, 2002; Mackey, 2002; Kivisto, 2002; Mahtani, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000). This not only overlooks the internal heterogeneity of ethnic and racial categories (Chanady, 2004), but also fails to account for the fluidity of identity across multiple, overlapping forms of belonging (Baubock, 2006; Goonewardena and Kipfer, 2005). As Bannerji (2000) puts it, "social being becomes a matter of a cultural essence" (p. 36). Moreover, there is little consideration given to how the socio-historical and geographical contingency of the Canadian experience contributes to the dissolution of longstanding ethnic and racial categories. Finally, as Mahtani (2002) has convincingly argued, such categories simply do not accommodate (and are indeed constantly exceeded by) the growing number of Canadian individuals with multiple ethnic ancestries or whose religion or race mean their affiliations cross-cut ethnic boundaries. Even strong advocates of multiculturalism acknowledge that the ethno-racial categories privileged by multicultural discourse are "crude and out of date" (Kymlicka, 2007a, p. 78), making the critique of cultural essentialism particularly influential (Ley, 2007).³⁷

The general argument presented above has been advanced from a variety of political and theoretical standpoints. Having said this, different scholars place

³⁷ In a recent analysis of multiculturalism in Canada, Kernerman (2005) supports the overall argument outlined in this paragraph when he claims that within Canadian multicultural discourse, "diversity is conceived of as an assortment of different identities, and difference is understood superficially to mean difference among the various identity categories. An identity is, in effect, a unit of difference. The logic of identity is grounded in a refusal of alterity, a denial of complexity, in favour of reified and simplified identity categories" (p. 6).

different emphasis on the broader implications and outcomes of constructing minority groups primarily according to ethno-racial categories. The standard assessment from the political right is that multiculturalism seizes upon and reinforces differences in the Canadian population based on their immigrant origins, thereby acting as a divisive discourse that weakens senses of national unity and belonging. In Canada, one of the most vocal proponents of this view is Bissoondath (2002) who argues that multiculturalism leads to multiple solitudes rather than a cohesive national culture (see also Gregg, 2006 for an argument concerning the divisive nature of Canadian multiculturalism). Although Kymlicka (2004) acknowledges that the multicultural emphasis on difference has the potential to impede national integration and constitutes “a serious concern” (p. 47), he claims that such right-wing perspectives betray a worrying strain of cultural imperialism (1995). He argues that a cohesive nation that acknowledges and protects the cultural difference of minority groups “is neither a conceptual contradiction nor a practical impossibility” (2004, p. 50). This he proposes, is borne out in Canada where,

there is strong evidence [that multiculturalism] has helped to improve the political integration of new comers to Canada, unlike the more laissez-faire approaches of the United States and Continental Europe. And the fact that Canadians exhibit higher levels of comfort with ethnic diversity and less fear of immigration compared to the citizens of virtually all other Western democracies is likely due, in part, to the policy framework. (Kymlicka, 2007a, p. 70)

Ley (2007) contends the same and goes on to argue that multiculturalism is a source of national unity insofar as it has become a defining cultural value of

Canadians. Moreover, he suggests that in recent years the Federal government has promoted anti-discrimination, employment equity, civic participation and institutional integration under the rubric of multiculturalism, all of which enhance the integration of minorities. Thus, I conclude that the conservative critique is far too subjective and value laden to take center stage in our dialogue with Brand's novel.³⁸

Other scholarship has attempted to reveal the persistent power relations that underpin multicultural discourse in Canada. For Goonewardena and Kipfer (2005) this is a particularly important exercise because these sites of power have become less than obvious: "Precisely because multiculturalism here *has* made a symbolic dent in the *explicitly* ethno-centric and White supremacist notions of Canadianness, the political meaning of the distinction between its subaltern and dominant urban practices, a distinction that surely exists, no longer appears clear-cut" (p. 672; emphasis in original). One important line of argument commonly advanced is that a dominant Canadian identity, possessed by White individuals of Anglo-European ancestry, acts as a normative – albeit implied – point of departure from which Others are defined as members of discrete ethno-racial groups that form part of a national multi-culture (Mahtani, 2002; Mackey, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000). From this perspective, 'Whiteness' is identified as an implicit feature of Canadian identity. Consequently, the hyphenated identities that have become commonplace under multiculturalism (i.e. Jamaican-Canadian, Vietnamese-Canadian, Black-Canadian,

³⁸ For K. Mitchell (2004), the conservative backlash against multiculturalism is a prime example of neoliberal ideology according to which "individuals are constituted as atomized, free-thinking and entrepreneurial subjects who can 'choose' to assimilate or not as they wish" (p. 643).

etc.) have been regarded by some critics as markers of “distance-difference” from the normative (“*Canadian-Canadian*” [Mackey 2002]) centre against which they are defined (Mahtani, 2002). Similarly, it is only in relation to this normative centre that the category ‘visible minority’, so naturalized within the context of Canadian multiculturalism, acquires meaning as that which is not part of the (in)visible (White Anglo-European) majority that is implicitly constructed as the core Canadian people (Bannerji, 2000). It is important to note that the process of Othering, under scrutiny here, is accompanied by a reciprocal construction of the normative Self. As Mackey (2002) argues persuasively, tolerance of cultural pluralism in the form of official multiculturalism has become “institutionalized as a key feature of the mythology of identity of the dominant White Anglophone majority” (p. 3).³⁹ This is problematic, she goes on to note, because tolerance necessarily implies the possibility of its corollary – intolerance – and in so doing reproduces the dominance of those with the power to define how difference is tolerated.⁴⁰

³⁹ Conveniently, this has fed into Canadian cultural nationalism, which has long sought bases for distinguishing Canada from Britain while simultaneously resisting the cultural imperialism of the USA whose ‘melting-pot’ approach to diversity is often represented as the diametric opposite of Canadian multiculturalism (Mackey, 2002; Day, 2000).

⁴⁰ Focusing on a strand of this broader argument, Day (2000) points out that the framework of official bilingualism within which multiculturalism operates in Canada means that ethnically defined communities are encouraged to retain their culture (rather than assimilate to a dominant norm), yet in *de facto* terms they are required to adopt the language of one of two (regionally) dominant groups if they are to participate in the economic and political life of the nation. For Day (2000), this “strategic contradiction” (p. 197) reinforces entrenched power structures by allowing the dominant group to set the parameters for the integration of ethnically defined immigrant groups.

Other scholars have sought to critique the power relations underlying multicultural discourse from a materialist perspective. They argue that while multicultural discourse may acknowledge, tolerate and even celebrate ethno-racial pluralism, it does not foster an environment that prioritizes addressing socio-economic inequality. In fact, by emphasising the cultural rights of ethno-racial minorities rather than addressing substantive differences in terms of labour market integration, political influence, or access to resources and services, Canadian multicultural discourse can be said to create an illusion of harmonious equality or innocent pluralism while reinforcing the hegemony and power of the dominant group (Goonewardena and Kipfer, 2005; Rees, 2003; Mackey, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000). Issues of social justice are thus transformed into issues of cultural diversity (Bannerji, 2000). Indeed, according to Goonewardena and Kipfer (2005), “for the major devotees, detractors and deconstructors of difference who are engaged in the debate on multiculturalism in Canada all tend to operate with fundamentally culturalist conceptions of identity, while maintaining a symptomatic silence on socio-economic divisions that are especially influential in the everyday life of big cities” (p. 673-4). This appears to be a particularly pointed critique, if one considers the comparatively poor labour market performance of recent immigrants relative to earlier cohorts, as well as a generalized decrease in income levels in urban areas with a concentration of visible minorities, especially in Toronto (see Banting, Courchene and Seidle, 2007 for a well referenced summary of research on socio-economic disadvantage among immigrant groups).⁴¹

⁴¹ Kymlicka (2007b) argues that multicultural policy in Canada has been limited to

The alleged prioritization of cultural recognition over socio-economic equality hardly means that multicultural discourse has remained outside the play of global capitalism. A number of scholars have argued that multiculturalism has become increasingly drawn into city branding exercises and international competition within a knowledge-based economy (Goonewardena and Kipfer, 2005; Mitchell, 2004; Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002). According to Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002):

Multiculturalism has been challenged by a new emphasis of diversity as a competitive lever. Under the initial call in 1986 that "multiculturalism means business" the policy focus since the 1990s especially emphasized the economic exploitation of Canada's racial and ethnic diversity to capture markets at home and abroad, at the probable expense of gender equality and other equality initiatives. Multiculturalism has also been increasingly positioned as an area where Canada can "export" policy ideas to other countries. (p. 168)

There are two broader implications here. First, that multiculturalism becomes about manufacturing a neat image of diversity that suits a particular economic end. Second, that the insertion of minority groups into the economic world of cities and the nation becomes predicated on ethno-racial membership, thereby further prescribing 'acceptable' categories of identity in reductionist terms. Ultimately, the

promoting cultural expression among minority groups, but has also advanced socio-economic integration through affirmative action programs targeted at institutional participation and employment equity. The question here is not only whether enough has been done to promote socio-economic integration, but also whether doing so, with reference to monolith categories of ethnic and racial membership, actually further contributes to dividing Canadians along these lines. Must the categories of ethnicity and race take center stage in the pursuit of social equality or might the latter be achieved without the need to reinforce a national imaginary based on discrete cultural communities?

imbrication of multicultural discourse with economic boosterism reinforces the notion that identities are being assigned as much as they are being recognized.

Ultimately, for Mackey (2002), multiculturalism is a means through which power is exerted, not by erasing difference, but rather by managing it through a flexible strategy that defines, contains and reifies group identities according to a particular set of essentialized criteria. Bannerji (2000) advances a similar view, arguing that multiculturalism is an “ideological state apparatus,” “a device for constructing and ascribing political subjectivities and agencies for those who are seen as legitimate and full citizens and others who are peripheral in many senses” (p. 6). She goes on to suggest that within multicultural discourse “we are encouraged to forget that people do not have a fixed political agency, and as subjects of complex and contradictory social relations can be summoned as subjects and agents in diverse ways” (p. 6). A counter argument holds that by recognizing them as meaningful entities, multiculturalism actually facilitates the mobilization of ethno-racially defined groups for the purposes of affirmative political action that seeks to reduce social inequalities in tangible ways. As Abu-Laban (2002) puts forth, if one can get over the worst excesses of essentialism, multicultural discourse actually fosters attempts to overcome social exclusion along ethno-racial lines. Yet, “[w]hen it speaks of and through itself, the ethnic [and racial] subject also speaks back to what defines it and thus delimits it as ethnic [or racial]. Even when the ethnic subject seems to be entirely motivated by a discourse of resistance to the surrounding hegemonic discourses, it never distances itself completely from them” (Kamboureli, 1998, p.

211). Thus, regardless of whether one considers it to hinder or facilitate integration, multicultural discourse can be said to sort and categorize people into groups according to ethnic and racial criteria that are, in turn, reinforced as defining components of their identity.

The question now becomes, how does Brand's novel engage this discursive context and the debates it has generated? Concluding the chapter by interrogating this, allows us to consider the broader implications and relevance of my reading of *What We All Long For*. It also furthers one of the broader objectives of the thesis, which is to consider how literary representations can help us rethink the social and geographical imaginary of identity and informal citizenship in multicultural cities such as Toronto and London.

'Everyday multiculturalism': Reimagining the politics of pluralism from the ground up

While Dionne Brand does not explicitly refer to multiculturalism in the novel, her representation of the spatial identity politics of informal urban citizenship in Toronto resonates strongly with debates on multiculturalism as a social discourse in the Canadian context. To begin with, the novel's depiction of the immigrant characters, and indeed the siblings and friends of the second-generation protagonists, recalls the critique that multicultural discourse assigns individual and collective identities based on ethnic and racial criteria. Depending on one's perspective, such identities become the basis of progressive political mobilization or continued socio-economic

marginalization. Brand seems to imply the latter over the former. As we saw earlier, powerful structural forces work through everyday urban spaces to assign her immigrant characters marginal urban identities that are predicated on ethno-racial forms of belonging. This, in turn, conditions the inclusion of these characters in the urban labour market, either by denying them opportunities (as in the case of Oku and Jackie's parents) or creating opportunities by virtue of ethno-racial membership rather than personal qualifications (as in the case of Tuyen's parents). It also conditions the relationship between various characters – namely Jackie's parents, Jamal and Oku's friends – and the urban authorities, who are depicted as essentially racist when it comes to policing and urban planning.

Significantly, the structural forces that impose these limited and limiting socio-spatial urban identities are enacted by a normative constellation of identity-power that is also defined on ethno-racial grounds – namely White, Anglo-European Torontonians. Consequently, if one focuses on a particular set of Brand's characters, her novel represents a city in which a dominant group exerts its power by regulating diversity through the assignation of socio-spatial identities based on ethnic and racial membership. These assigned identities differentiate individuals from the normative charter group and become a basis for social, spatial and economic marginalization. Within this context, informal urban citizenship eludes the immigrant characters (and some of the minor second-generation characters as well) who have limited agency over the terms of their insertion within the social and economic spheres of the city. Thus, it could be argued that, on one level, *What We*

All Long For effectively reproduces and circulates an existing critique made of social relations within the context of multicultural discourse in Canada. In the process of dramatizing this critique, Brand not only gives it renewed currency among her (extensive) readership, but she also attributes urban space with an important role in structuring social relations within multicultural Toronto.

It is very much in relation to the above that I have read the emergent urban identity of Brand's four principal second-generation characters. As discussed earlier, their inhabitation of everyday urban spaces in downtown Toronto fosters the emergence of an urban identity that eschews essentialized categories of group membership in favour of identification with the very notion of diversity itself. For Brand's second-generation characters, identity is fluid and cross-cuts multiple forms of urban difference. Importantly, the negotiation of this identity is an important means through which they resist being socio-spatially bracketed and marginalized by the same structural forces that impinge upon the urban lives of the other characters in the novel. This representation, I would argue, can be said to simultaneously challenge and reimagine social relations within the discursive context identified. More specifically, Brand's depiction of identity among second-generation Torontonians replaces what Bannerji (2000) calls "elite multiculturalism with an everyday multiculturalism, one generated from below rather than imposed from above" (p. 5). As Walcott (2007) proposes "[e]veryday or popular multiculturalism requires us to think about the lives people make across difference and, importantly, connections that produce new modes of rationality and being" (p. 19). In Brand's

novel the production of such alternative modes of sociability are offered as a basis for contesting informal urban citizenship in the multicultural city.

Brand's representation of identity among her second-generation characters evokes what Amin and Thrift (2002b) describe as an intercultural ethos:

An intercultural ethos signals a shift in political philosophy, centred around the everyday, the pragmatic and the affective, but also, crucially, a re-examination of what it means to be social in a multicultural society. This involves making space for a 'moral cosmopolitanism' (Hill, 2000) or a 'planetary humanism' (Gilroy, 2000) that values the stranger, that sheds tribalistic and community belonging, that welcomes engagement with others not like ourselves as a basis for becoming someone else, freed from yesterday's moorings (including the comforts of ethnic closure). (p. 297-8)

It is precisely a re-examination and re-imagination of what it means to be social in a demographically and discursively multicultural city that Brand offers her audience. In effect, she encourages the reader to think beyond the essentialized categories of multicultural discourse and consider new ways of conceptualizing identity, belonging and political agency in Toronto.

If urban space is central to shaping identity and informal urban citizenship among the immigrant characters in Brand's novel, it plays an equally central role in the case of the second-generation characters. Indeed, the inhabitation and experience of urban spaces is central to Brand's reimagining of informal urban citizenship in the multicultural city. As Wood and Gilbert (2005) suggest, approaching

multiculturalism in terms of everyday practices and inhabitations of urban space is essential to conceptualizing the dynamics of cohabiting difference in the city beyond the parameters of official discourse. They argue that multiculturalism can be rethought from the ground up by focussing on the spatial encounters and dynamics of everyday life in the city. This is precisely the perspective furthered by a geographical reading of Brand's novel, in which the spatial negotiation of identity in the city can be seen as subverting the most problematic aspects of multicultural discourse critiqued by the scholars referenced above. Indeed, as my analysis proposes, Brand encourages her readership to regard everyday spaces in the city as 'ground zero' for the politics of informal urban citizenship in the multicultural city. In doing so, she grounds the politics of cultural pluralism firmly in the terrain of everyday urban life.

SECTION III

THE REPRESENTATION OF INFORMAL URBAN CITIZENSHIP IN LONDON: THE LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES OF NIRPAL SINGH DHALIWAL'S *TOURISM* AND GAUTAM MALKANI'S *LONDONSTANI*

INTRODUCTION

London, England. Once the nerve-centre of Europe's largest empire, London has long been the destination of transnational flows of people, goods, information and culture from around the world. Yet it was with the mass arrival of migrants from former British colonies in the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent during the mid-twentieth century that London emerged as a truly diverse city characterized by substantive ethnic, racial and religious pluralism. Today, with the birth of the children and grandchildren of these migrants, and a new wave of migrants and refugees from around the world, approximately 30% or 2.25 million Londoners are classified as members of non-White ethnicities by the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2007). This ethno-racial plurality goes hand in hand with the highest religious diversity of any city in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2007). As a result of the co-presence and interaction of diverse cultural groups, London has emerged as an important site where the politics of difference and conviviality are played out in modern Britain. For the same reasons, it is also a key space for the production, performance and transformation of urban cultures and identities. Consequently, and given that over half the members of London's non-White ethnicities are now British born, London is a privileged site for considering the spatial identity politics of informal urban citizenship among the second generation. This is precisely what I

will be doing in my analysis of two novels that represent the everyday spaces and urban lives of Londoners born to Indian parents.⁴²

The first novel under consideration, *Tourism* by Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, is written as a first-person narrative in the voice of Bhupinder 'Puppy' Singh Johal, a second-generation Londoner in his late twenties whose Sikh parents immigrated to Britain from the Punjab region of northern India. The novel is set largely in central London during the late spring and summer of 2002, a time-frame that coincides almost exactly with that of Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*. Having said this, the narrative often tracks back in time to describe Puppy's youth growing up in the multi-ethnic, working class London suburb of Southall, as well as the period leading up to and following his move to central London at the age of around twenty. Less plot dependent than character and context driven, the narrative essentially offers the reader a window into Puppy's urban life, experiences and encounters in multi-cultural London. Politically incorrect to the extreme, *Tourism* is marked by Puppy's unconventional and controversial views on the spaces and people with whom he

⁴² My choice to focus specifically on British-born children of Asian origin stems primarily from the availability of these two recent novels, whose narrative content supports a fecund analysis of British Indians negotiating spaces and identities in the city. As noted earlier, my selection of case studies emerged in tandem with my reading of novels that speak to the broader themes of the thesis. Furthermore, this focus is also justified by the fact that ethnic Indians constitute the largest ethnic minority group in London, totaling almost half a million people (ONS 2007). Partly as a result, they are amongst the most prominent minority groups in London, their presence being felt in the city's social, cultural, economic, and political circuits and imprinted on the urban landscape in the form of ethnic businesses. This alone makes the case study of particular relevance. In addition, as I show in Chapter Seven, the novels are particularly well suited to intervening in current debates on the politics of pluralism in Britain.

engages during his everyday life in the city. Further in keeping with *What We All Long For*, *Tourism*, is a highly spatial novel in which the action occurs in a variety of places and spaces in London, whose specific characteristics and socio-cultural composition feature prominently in the novel's representation of identity politics in the city.

The second novel under consideration, *Londonstani* by Gautam Malkani, depicts a year⁴³ in the urban lives of four nineteen-year-old youths – Hardjit, Amit, Ravi and Jas. Together, these characters comprise a gang of self-identified 'Desi-Rudeboys', a label intended to capture an assertive urban street culture associated with second-generation British youth of South Asian parentage. All four were raised and continue to live in Hounslow, a suburban borough of London located in the far west of the metropolitan region adjacent to both Southall and Heathrow airport. Hardjit is the son of Sikh immigrants whereas Ravi and Amit are the children of Hindu immigrant parents. Although it is only revealed in the final chapter of the novel, Jas, the most recent addition to the gang, is not of Indian origin at all, but rather a White British youth (full name: Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden) who has self-consciously sought to adopt the particular second-generation identity of his three peers. As the novel's narrator, Jas offers the reader an almost anthropological account of the Desi-Rudeboy culture he is attempting to internalize, describing the set of values, attitudes, perspectives, behaviours, practices and activities associated with his new

⁴³ Although the calendar span of this time-frame is not offered to the reader, given the pop-culture references in the text, it is safe to assume that the action in the novel takes place within a year or two of the period covered by narrative action in both *Tourism* and *What We All Long For*.

associates and now himself. Through Jas' narration, the novel generates a detailed and evocative representation of how informal urban citizenship is contested within the socio-spatial milieu of Hounslow (as well as London more generally) through the performance of a Desi-Rudeboy identity.

Tourism and *Londonstani* were both published in 2006 to widespread critical attention. Their respective authors are both second-generation Londoners of ethnic Indian background who are now in their mid-thirties. Like his main protagonist, Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal (1974-) was born in west London to Punjabi immigrants. He pursued English and American Studies at Nottingham University before taking a job in broadcasting at the BBC, which he left to become a freelance journalist and writer in 2000. His pieces now regularly appear in such newspapers as *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Evening Standard*. Prior to the publication of *Tourism*, Dhaliwal was already a minor public figure in Britain owing to his marriage to Liz Jones, a fashion editor and journalist. In her widely-read weekly column in *The Mail on Sunday*, she published many intimate details of their often turbulent marriage and complained endlessly about Dhaliwal's particular brand of masculinity (they divorced in 2007 after seven years). As a result, Dhaliwal quickly became a focal point for heated discussions about the cultural politics of gender, marriage and feminism. The publication of *Tourism*, which offers a bold and uncompromising perspective on ethnic, race, and gender relations, increased Dhaliwal's public profile as a highly controversial and provocative figure who elicits both assent and disdain for his views on the politics of identity in contemporary Britain.

Gautam Malkani (1976-) was also born and raised in West London. His mother is part of the large cohort of ethnic Indians who immigrated to Britain from Uganda in the early 1970s. He studied social and political sciences at Christ's College, University of Cambridge, and then joined *The Financial Times* as a journalist, where he continues to work today. *Londonstani* grew out of his undergraduate thesis, for which he researched what he calls the "Brit-Asian rudeboy scene" (Malkani, 2009). His original intention was to write a non-fictional account of this urban culture, but over time he decided to incorporate his research material into a novel (Malkani, 2009). The manuscript was sold for a large advance at the Frankfurt Book Fair and drew considerable attention upon its release. The recognition Malkani has received for his depiction of Rudeboy culture in West London seems to have spurred much of his recent journalism to focus on themes broadly connected to the novel, such that he has become a commentator on British Asian youth culture, social integration and so forth. Yet, his contributions to the public debate have been far more measured than Dhaliwal's and he has not courted controversy (or attention) in the same way.

Given the parallels between the novels – in terms of publication dates, background of the authors, and general subject matter – many reviews of one novel often carried mention of the other. In a number of cases they were reviewed in tandem. As a result, *Tourism* and *Londonstani* were circulated among the reading public as a sort of couplet on the politics of identity amongst British-Indian youth. It is thus fitting that they are discussed here for their combined contribution to the geographical imagination of urban citizenship in multicultural London.

In keeping with the analytical focus outlined earlier in the thesis, my reading of both novels focuses on the relationships between the production of urban identities, everyday inhabitations of space and informal urban citizenship. More specifically, I propose that among the main characters in both *Tourism* and *Londonstani*, informal urban citizenship is negotiated through the spatial production of what some scholars have referred to as 'Brasian' identities (Wetherell, 2008; Ali, Kalra & Sayyid, 2006; Harris, 2006; Sharma & Sharma et al, 1996). Derived from fusing the words British and Asian, the term Brasian describes identities that are derived from the selective incorporation of British, South Asian, and other cultural influences co-present in urban Britain. These hybrid identities are said to fundamentally alter the cultures from which they draw into new forms of group membership and belonging that speak to the fluidity of identity in the multicultural city. Indeed, the production of Brasian identities can be seen as a means through which second-generation youth in Britain claim their right to the city (and indeed the nation) by exerting agency over the production of culture.

In relation to Brand's novel, I essentially argue that the spatial negotiation of identities that transcends normative ethno-racial categorizations is offered as a progressive basis for informal urban citizenship. I propose that a somewhat different perspective is offered in *Tourism* and *Londonstani*. Albeit in different ways, I argue that in both of these novels, the spatial negotiation of Brasian identities in London gives rise to fundamentally ambiguous or equivocal forms of urban citizenship. On one hand, the inhabitation of everyday urban spaces by the

principal second-generation characters allows for the performance of urban identities that are underscored by individual choice and agency with respect to self-definition and urban living. Put differently, the everyday activation and inhabitation of urban spaces in London fosters a politics of identity through which the characters negotiate their 'place' (both literally and metaphorically) in the urban public. On the other hand, in both cases, the experience of everyday spaces and the Brazilian identities performed within them can also be argued to condition the ability of the characters to claim substantive and sustained urban citizenship in multicultural London. Rather, urban citizenship remains partial, provisional, incomplete. This underlying ambiguity plays itself out very differently in each of the novels under consideration, making a semi-autonomous reading of *Tourism* and *Londonstani* more appropriate. However, the underlying commonality between the two novels means that they make a joint contribution to shaping the geographical and sociological imaginary of urban citizenship among second-generation British youth.

Following the present introduction, I pursue the argument above in relation to the two novels under consideration, dedicating a separate chapter to each. This is followed by a third chapter in which I seek to situate my analysis in relation to contemporary scholarship on cultural pluralism in Britain. In keeping with my stated approach, the goal here is to show how the representations of informal urban citizenship discussed in my analysis of the novels offer a relevant intervention into current scholarship. I begin this third chapter by considering the often sordid relationship between growing ethno-racial diversity and British narratives of

nationhood during the latter half of the 20th century. In doing so, I privilege arguments that the accommodation and incorporation of ethnic and racial diversity in Britain has been underpinned by problematic conceptions of cultural distance and essential difference. I then discuss how scholars have pointed to the emergence of Brasian identities as a prime example of how hybrid forms of cultural membership simultaneously challenge and redefine the normative social landscape of British cities, and by extension the nation as a whole. Put differently, this perspective emphasizes the progressive political potential of Brasian identities as a basis for contesting social inclusion. Having surveyed this literature, I conclude the chapter and this section of the thesis by considering how the representation of Brasian identities as an ambiguous foundation for informal urban citizenship generates a more tempered vision of the political currency of this cultural category. That is to say, while the novels do suggest that Brasian identities can constitute a basis for negotiating informal urban citizenship in multicultural London, they also suggest the possibility of limitations in this regard. Ultimately, I propose that *Tourism* and *Londonstani* encourage us to adopt a more equivocal and spatially grounded perspective on the politics of informal urban citizenship in multicultural London.

CHAPTER 5

Cosmopolitan misfit: Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism*

"I'm just a fucking tourist, I just look at the view" (p. 85).

In a number of respects, Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's debut novel *Tourism* and Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* share a number of commonalities above and beyond an almost identical time-frame for the narrative action. To begin with, Dhaliwal's principal character, Puppy, shares the desire of Brand's characters to distance himself from the socio-spatial milieu of the immigrant neighbourhood, Southall, in which he was raised and the traditional Sikh-Punjabi upbringing that was imposed on him there. Further recalling Brand's second-generation characters in Toronto, Puppy trades immigrant Southall for central London where his everyday life encompasses a variety of urban spaces that together reflect the city's ethno-racial, class and social diversity as well as the ways in which this diversity intersects and fuses. Like Tuyen, Carla, Oku and Jackie, Puppy lives his life across these spaces, moving between them as a proficient urbanite, with ease, confidence and competency. Yet, his experience of central London and the way it informs his urban identity is markedly different from the characters in Brand's novel. Despite his cosmopolitan urbanity, Puppy positions himself as being constantly 'out of place' in each of the (very different) socio-spatial environments to which his everyday life takes him. The reasons for his sense of displacement vary in relation to the specific

social and cultural characteristics of the urban spaces in question as well as the circumstances in which he finds himself there, but generally stem from the perception of fundamental difference – in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, class, political views, gender and sexual outlooks, etc. – from the people and groups he encounters. Consequently, Puppy's spatial negotiation of London produces a deeply ambiguous form of urban citizenship given that on one hand, his everyday life is characterized by a seemingly unconstrained, cosmopolitan inhabitation of the multicultural city, whereas on the other hand, his experiences of everyday spaces give rise to a constant sense of displacement and disassociation from the socio-cultural environments surrounding him.

My reading of *Tourism* focuses on the relationships between the inhabitation of urban spaces and the negotiation of an urban identity among Dhaliwal's main second-generation character, Puppy. In particular, I consider how Puppy's engagement with different urban spaces, and the social encounters to which these give rise, frame his positioning relative to others in the city. I begin by piecing together Puppy's recollections of growing up in Southall and use these to consider the relationship between space and identity in his youth. I then discuss how he decides to leave Southall to live in central London and in so doing makes a conscious break with the identity of his youth in favour of an opportunity to redefine himself in the city. Much of the remainder of the reading focuses on the spaces of Puppy's everyday life in central London and how these play a role in shaping his sense of self within the infinitely plural context of contemporary multicultural London.

I conclude my analysis by arguing that Puppy's socio-spatial experience of central London produces an ambiguous form of urban citizenship characterized by both a cosmopolitan inhabitation of the city and the perception of perpetual outsider. In the final chapter of this section I consider the broader significance of this reading by discussing how it relates to current scholarship of cultural pluralism in Britain.

Growing up Sikh in Southall

Puppy is the eldest child of Indian Sikhs who emigrated to Southall from rural Punjab. He was raised by his mother after his father abandoned the family. Puppy's mother is a barely literate woman of peasant origins for whom adopting a British way of life is not an option she is equipped to even contemplate. She provides for the family by running a shop – “a messy hybrid of confectioner's, newsagent, grocery and liquor store” (p. 39) – that her departed husband had opened downstairs from the family home. Although she was not a practicing Sikh or even baptized prior to coming to Britain, she became increasingly religious during Puppy's early years. “England,” the reader is informed, “brought out the Zealot in her” (p. 39). When Puppy's violent, adulterous and alcoholic father left her and his young children, “her spiritual fervour reached its peak” (p. 137). Not only did she take to strictly following the tenets of Sikhism, but she insisted that her children do so as well. Throughout his youth, Puppy was not allowed to shave and was made, at first, to wrap his uncut hair in a *joodha*, a small bun “like a little suet pudding” (p. 44), then, as he got older, in a turban. Sundays he was made to spend at the

gurdwara attending religious services, eating *langar* and taking Punjabi lessons. As a result of the traditional Sikh-Punjabi upbringing 'imposed' on him by his mother, Puppy's experience of everyday spaces in Southall – including the family home, public spaces and school – is characterized by the condition of marginalized Other.

Far more interested in British television, football and girls, than he was in religion or Punjabi language and culture, it is evident that Puppy felt profoundly disconnected in the family home, whose religious and cultural iconography marked it as a Punjabi-Sikh space. Yet, it was in the public spaces of Southall and in the schoolyard that the outward projection of his youthful identity most clearly shapes a marginal social position and sense of exclusion. For instance, he is deeply embarrassed to be in public with his mother whose zealous Sikhism is evident from her appearance and actions.⁴⁴ On one occasion she drags him along to a fetid canal where she performs a religious ceremony that involves "bowing and moaning imprecations, stopping every few minutes to lob a sacred coconut into the water" (p. 138). All this occurs under the gaze of White factory workers on lunch break, whose "faces showed their bewilderment at these two wogs and their inscrutable ways" (p. 138). Although Puppy is deeply ashamed by this episode and repudiates his religion and the entire surrounding cultural apparatus, he nonetheless continues to be related to as an 'inscrutable wog', especially by the working class youth of Southall:

⁴⁴ In addition to the way she dresses, his mother refuses to remove her copious facial hair in observance with Sikh custom.

I hate poor White people. No one is more stupid or useless. They made my life hell when I was a child. At school, every Asian was habitually called a Paki, but I was given special treatment. My *joodha* – or ‘top-knot’ or ‘bobble head’ as they called it – made me the focus of relentless abuse. I’d be pushed around the playground, slapped and taunted; they’d descend on me like harpies, trying to knock it off my head. [...] My last two years at primary school were impossible. Before then, no one had noticed me. I had no friends, apart from Asaf, and he wasn’t a friend, just another ‘stani’ who’d been ostracized from the herd. We spent our break periods together, sharing our loneliness; for this we were labeled ‘gaylords’ by those who made pariahs of us in the first place. The other Asian kids ignored my suffering; they were glad I was taking the heat and not them. The Blacks were only too happy to join in; in fact, Black boys were among my worst tormentors. (p. 116)

This abuse spills over from the schoolyard and onto the streets, where he is habitually assaulted and harassed. For Puppy a traditional Sikh-Punjabi identity means marginalization, not only from members of the charter group, but also members of other minorities who see him as a target due to his difference.

These socio-spatial experiences of Southall doubly marginalize Puppy insofar as they are predicated upon an ethno-racial and religious identity that he did not choose in the first place and would have more than willingly discarded had he been allowed to do so by his mother. In his youth, Puppy can be regarded as embodying a deeply troubled Brasian identity, one that is shaped less by competing attachments to ‘British’ and ‘Asian’ culture, and more by an inability to belong to either formation. Rather he is marginal to both and is therefore inevitably caught between them. As the analysis proceeds, it will become apparent that Puppy’s childhood experiences of Southall were highly formative, shaping his outlook on specific urban groups (such as working class Whites, Afro-Caribbean’s and other

Asians) and his broader perspective on social relations in the multicultural city, which he regards as a series of antagonisms between groups defined by ethnic, racial, class, and cultural differences. Ultimately, as we shall see, his early experiences also go a long way toward explaining how, as an adult he positions himself within the social world of London.

As Puppy gets older, he begins to exert agency over his identity in the city. In the first instance this means casting off the most obvious markers of his Punjabi-Sikh upbringing. Much to his mother's despair, at the end of his teenage years he cuts off his long hair, shaves, begins to eat meat, smoke and drink and no longer observes religious practices.⁴⁵ In the second instance, he refuses to fulfill the (extremely high) culturally rooted expectations placed upon him by his mother, who effectively saw his success as compensation for a life of suffering on her part. In his last year of A-levels he is offered a place at prestigious Durham University, but deliberately fails his exams and loses his spot. "I wanted to be a failure," he confesses in conversation to another character, "I didn't want anything to be expected of me anymore" (p. 187). Instead of going to Durham to study medicine, he goes to a former polytechnic in Leicester to study business administration, but

⁴⁵ Yet curiously, as an adult he wears a gold *Khandha* – perhaps the most important emblem of the Sikh religion – around his neck. When queried about it as he undresses for a prostitute, who asks whether he is Indian, his disinterested reply is "Yeah...I guess I am" (p. 14). Nothing further is offered on the symbolic value of the *Khandha* emblem to Puppy, yet his decision to wear it serves as a reminder of how his identity – both as seen by himself and others – is indelibly linked to the religious and cultural context of his youth.

never completes the course due to lack of interest and a desire not to continue studying at an institution with a primarily “Asian” student body.

Having made a decisive break with the Sikh-Punjabi identity of his youth and the expectations that come with it, Puppy has little to do with his family and Southall more generally. He visits only once during the three months in which the majority of the novel is set, and then only because he needs to borrow money. During this brief visit to the family home, he barely manages to suppress the repugnance he feels towards his mother and breaks into an argument with his sister, whom he regards as “...an old world recidivist, who raised my nephews too sternly, harangued her husband to earn more money, buy more houses” (p. 36). He congratulates his nineteen-year-old brother, who now runs the family shop, on his upcoming arranged marriage and promises to be his best man, but, as the reader learns later in the novel, he forgets to attend the wedding. At the first excuse – a text message from a girl he had recently met at a bar – Puppy heads back into central London, not taking the time to congratulate an Indian neighbour on his first child and pretending not to see an acquaintance he walked past on the way to the bus stop. Unlike his siblings and childhood peers, Puppy’s adult life in London does not revolve around the social, cultural and economic spaces and networks of Southall. Rather, not long after dropping out of university, Puppy moves to central London where he engages with a new set of urban spaces that play a formative role in shaping his urban identity.

Puppy's inhabitation of downtown London includes a heterogeneous mix of urban places and spaces that are defined by a variety of socio-cultural and economic characteristics. For ease of analysis, these geographies can be categorized as residential spaces (I use the plural because he has two very different places of residence during the novel), work spaces, and leisure spaces. As outlined earlier, his inhabitation and negotiation of these geographies is marked by a curious mix of cosmopolitanism and profound displacement resulting from his sense difference – whether based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, political views and so forth – from the people he encounters there. He lives his life across multiple spaces and forms of difference, yet fails to identify with any of them, remaining a detached and cynical observer of the socio-spatial milieus he inhabits. The equivocality of Puppy's socio-spatial urban life is complex, nuanced and, above all, constituted by the novel's representation of everyday performances and encounters in the three geographies listed above. As I shall conclude, this ambiguous experience of central London leads to the formation of an equally ambiguous Brazilian identity that, in turn, underpins Puppy's informal urban citizenship in multicultural London.

London living: Cosmopolitan misfit in the global city

Residential spaces

Upon leaving the family home in Southall, Puppy moves to Hackney in north east London, where he shares a rented flat with Michael, a Trinidadian friend he met

during a four-month journalism course. Hackney is a predominantly working-class neighbourhood and Puppy's flat is a rundown affair located directly above a bookmaker and across from a condemned council estate. It is a desperate urban landscape. On one occasion, sitting on his living room window ledge he watches a group of young Black men loitering on the sidewalk of Dalston Lane below:

They were couriers for crack dealers who operated inside, taking orders on mobile phones then despatching them via a flunky. One of these flunkies was bare-chested; he stood leaning on a railing at the edge of the road, caressing his six-pack. A young, very pretty Black girl walked by; he said something in lewd, inaudible patois, and the men laughed. Her face turned to the pavement, she walked a gauntlet of gold-capped sneers. The flunky with the six-pack walked behind her in a lopsided prance copied from MTV. I wondered how these arseholes kept it up – the incessant posture, the swagger – even when they wobbled about Hackney on bicycles made for children. (p. 63)

Commenting on this scene to Michael, Puppy says: "I've got to get out of Hackney. It's making me a racist" (p. 63). Michael, who is Black, can only agree and mutters "fucking mutts...." (p. 63). From the same vantage point, but on a different day, Puppy watches a group of White youth (or "White-trash" as he calls them) corner a pigeon and then kick it to death; "The cruelty and imbecility of the working class is limitless (p. 116)," he opines to the reader. Despite – or perhaps because of – his own working class origins and experience of growing up in Southall, Puppy feels little empathy for the condition of either of the two groups he has observed. He considers the Black youth to be boorish dupes to American pop culture, but does offer a passing excuse for their behaviour, noting that "they'd been fucked by slavery" (p. 116). For the White youth, he has nothing but utter disdain:

Poor White people, I can never pity. I've no concern for their class struggle [...]. The decline of the working class in what is, after all, their own country, only proves their stupidity. My mother barely spoke English, but was a competent, shop-owning micro-capitalist. If she can prosper in Great Britain, then it's only the truly fucking dumb who can't." (p. 116)

While Puppy shares the same class origins and material poverty of most people in Hackney, he feels nothing in the way of class solidarity with them. Any commonality they might share is entirely eclipsed by his contempt for what he regards as being racialized cultural behaviors and practices.

Puppy's interaction with an Indian man, Patel, who runs the local equivalent of his mother's shop, only underscores his sense of dislocation in Hackney. Happy to have another Indian to speak to, Patel allows Puppy to run a tab, who, in turn, listens to the shopkeeper's diatribes against the residents of Hackney. Patel is an angry man who is bitter at having spent most of his life working long hours serving a multi-racial underclass that is constantly trying to steal from him. He reminds Puppy of his mother: "Like my mum, Patel never questioned his life, which was a series of inescapable duties, not choices. Like my mum, he took great pride in having never failed in those duties; like her he had a constant sense of bitterness and unease" (p. 178). However, unlike Puppy's mother, Patel has two successful sons - one a lawyer and the other a doctor - that would ensure a comfortable retirement for him. Encountering Patel's sons reminds Puppy of the familial obligations he has shirked and reinforces his difference from what he perceives as the norm among other second-generation Asians:

Patel had raised a pair of judicious, conscientious young men. They were cowards and nerds, but smart ones. I'd met them many times, and always made the same tired conversation: we asked after one another's family and work, trading the maxims and homilies of our race. They shared their father's concrete certainty about life and the world, and didn't quite know what to make of me. My shapeless meandering existence was strange and exotic to them; they were amazed and unsettled by my lackadaisy. They'd lived by the tenets of our people; they were cosseted, neurotic and profoundly afraid. I'd talk about my life – what I wrote, what I read, the places I'd been and the girls I was seeing – and their eyes would glaze. Any suggestion at a world beyond their jobs, their families and their old man's precepts discomforted them. My life was a dangerous example; it contravened the logic behind their achievements. Bland and assiduous Indians were now the backbone of this country; the NHS, the legal system, the technocracies of commerce and the state were diligently upheld by men like Hanesh [Patel's son]. To him I was somewhat outré, and best kept at a distance. (p. 180)

Thus, even Puppy's closest peers in Hackney – other second-generation British-Asians – offer no basis for mutual identification based on common experience. Their culturally rooted choices and values stand in sharp contrast to his own, leading to a sense of fundamental difference between them despite any ostensible similarities.

Ultimately, then, Hackney is anything but a space of belonging for Puppy, who regards the neighborhood's working class population as being fractured along clearly defined ethno-racial groups, whose cultural practices and values offer him no basis for identification. Consequently, Puppy seizes on an opportunity to leave Hackney by moving in with Sophie, his new upper-class White girlfriend. Sophie's recently renovated Georgian townhouse, with its spacious designer interior, is a

welcome alternative to the near squalid flat in which he has spent the past years.

Moreover, it is in affluent Holland Park, which is a world away from Hackney:

[In Holland Park] everything was pristine; almost everyone was White. It felt beautiful, stepping out of the house and into her car, exchanging nods with the couple who lived opposite, obvious millionaires who assumed I was one too. Money alchemises people, the mere suspicion of it changes *everything*. The gentillesse of Sophie's street – people sharing glances and smiles, stepping aside for one another on the pavement – came from the mutual assumption of wealth. They were a beloved elect: Europeans, Arabs, Americans and Jews; each saw the other through a prism of money, and loved what they saw. I [had] lived in Hackney where people had nothing, or just enough to inspire resentment. Hackney's rich owned Land Rover Discoveries and Smeg fridge-freezers; Holland Park's owned *the world*. (p. 52-3; emphasis in original)

If, in Hackney, class is fractured by ethno-racial differences, in Holland Park such differences are subsumed by class harmony tied to material wealth. "Money," narrates Puppy, "is the most cosmopolitan thing in the world" (p. 150). Puppy is perennially broke, but he relies on the assumption of wealth to integrate into the neighbourhood. Confident and urbane – carrying himself like a young Asian designer or impresario – he succeeds in not appearing out of place in Holland Park. However, this superficial integration never translates into a sense of belonging within the neighbourhood and its social circles. Indeed, Puppy holds a highly cynical view of the upper classes, wryly commenting on their values and behaviors throughout the novel. Although he inhabits their spaces, he always retains a sardonic stance toward London's metropolitan elite commenting on them as an outsider.

Puppy's inability to ever truly belong in this socio-spatial milieu is brought home to him during a weekend he spends at a mansion in the Cotswolds among members of Sophie's family and a multi-racial group of upper class Londoners. Having awoken early on the Sunday morning, he plays back the CD that was made of the previous night's karaoke singing:

I sped through the disc, hearing snatches of everyone's performance. [...] Then I heard my own voice, and sat up. I'd never heard my voice objectively before, the sound of it surprised me. It was deep, earthy and monotone; the vowels were sluggish, each consonant landed with a thud. It was an absurd jumble of accents: cockney enunciation and occasional West Indian inflection overlaid a quiet drone from the Punjab. It was from Southall, and was incongruent with the rest. Like the sight of one's face, the sound of one's voice has great power; it situates you and conjures expectations in the minds of others. I was taken aback by how particular I was, how rooted in time and place: everything about me came from the Punjabi suburb of West London. I felt embarrassed. I realized how outlandish my presence here was. Everyone else belonged to a milieu of metropolitan wealth, their differences in colour subsumed within a shared order of money. Their lives were firmly aligned. Mine was experiencing just a glancing encounter with theirs before I ricocheted back into oblivion. (p. 189)⁴⁶

Despite being welcomed in the home and despite the social ease and adaptability he demonstrates when interacting with the others present, Puppy realizes he does not and will never belong in Holland Park. The barrier is ultimately his working class background and upbringing, which marks him out as fundamentally different and out of place in this exclusive space. By moving to Holland Park, Puppy has not

⁴⁶ Ironically, the fusion of linguistic influences is a feature that many academic texts highlight as an example of progressive cultural fusion on the part of Brazilian youth. It is nothing of the sort for Puppy. Rather, it is a basis for social difference based on class lines.

experienced social ascension, but rather he has taken advantage of an opportune situation to temporarily improve his fortunes. Perhaps reflecting his resignation to this, he does not bother to mobilize his new social networks for the purposes of more substantial professional advancement (despite the obvious potential for him to do so). This is not because he is content to simply enjoy the comforts of Sophie's house. To the contrary, he becomes increasingly unhappy there. Unmotivated to seek out work, he spends his days in the apartment eating the expensive foods Sophie buys for him, watching daytime television and getting seriously stoned. "[Sophie had] made a gilded cage for me; life here was so easy, I was slipping into lassitude, becoming a sort of pet. She wasn't the brightest girl, but even dumb chicks can outsmart most men" (p. 230). Thus, like Hackney, Holland Park is a space of dislocation for Puppy, even if he possesses the urban savoir-faire to partially integrate into its socio-spatial milieu.

Work spaces

Puppy works in journalism and the engagement with urban spaces associated with his work is central to his negotiation of identity in London. The first such space is the college where he took a four-month government subsidized journalism course designed to "help the unemployed and members of ethnic minorities to enter the news industry" (p. 71). The college gathers a multicultural student body, comprised mostly of Bangladeshi's and Afro-Caribbeans along with some Turks and White Britons, groups to which Puppy relates based on distance and difference. For

example, he makes no effort to befriend the Bangladeshi men, citing their “clownish” hip-hop garb and his own “Jat-Punjabi chauvinism” as justification. Instead he takes pleasure in provoking them by engaging the Bangladeshi girls in polite conversation – “the boys loitered and threw me caustic stares; stymied by religion,⁴⁷ their love lives consisted of bitter, solitary masturbation. I made no advances toward the girls; it would’ve caused a riot” (p. 74). In most cases, it is unlikely that Puppy would define himself as a Jat Punjabi – he has, after all, disassociated himself with his cultural background – yet his interaction with Bengali Muslims at the college brings out an innate perception of difference based on ethno-religious origins. Yet, it is the White British students for whom he reserves the greatest scorn, describing them as,

tedious, middle-class left wingers [...] who managed to turn every class into a political rally. It was 1996 [...] New Labour was about to bring a new era they thought, full of ideas and compassion. These kids wanted to be at its heart, the media nexus, managing the debates. Luckily, they had neither the talent nor the connections to get anywhere near it. (p. 73)

Puppy, of course, is blasé about the upcoming election and reveals a passing admiration for Thatcher, claiming that her “pull-yourself up by the bootstraps” (p. 73) brand of politics resonated with his working class upbringing. Thus, at the college, Puppy’s ethnic background and class politics are the axes of difference that separate him from the various groups he encounters there. The only enduring friendships he establishes are with two individuals, Michael (Afro-Caribbean) and Luca (White British), who share Puppy’s generalized lack of ambition, political

⁴⁷ Most Bangladeshis in Britain are Muslim and it is safe to assume that the reference here is to Islam.

ambivalence and, in Michael's case, acerbic outlook on race-relations in multicultural London.

Having completed the course with ease, Puppy obtains a job as entertainment correspondent for *UK Asian*, "a flimsy, stupid weekly paper aimed at 'second-generation British Asians'" (p. 211). The publication is described as capitalizing on New Labour's climate of "guilt" and "quasi-positive discrimination" (p. 212) following years of Thatcherism and the landmark report of the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. His job was to "produce sycophantic reviews of Bollywood films and bhangra boy bands; most of the stuff was too shit to endure and, as usual, I simply rewrote the press releases, not having watched or heard a thing" (p. 213). In sharp contrast, his ambitious colleagues, "didn't treat their work with the contempt it deserved" (p. 213) and worked hard in order to further their careers. Puppy regards the Bollywood films he reviews as "inane" and verging on "pantomime". At the bhangra clubs he visits on assignment, he is bemused by the Asian youths dancing to the "visceral rhythms of the Punjab," seeking the "peasant ecstasies of their forefathers" (p. 213). For Puppy the revival of bhangra and its metropolitan fusion with hip-hop, R&B, jungle and reggae music is hardly the complex form of cultural translation or progressive expression of identity, belonging and resistance found in academic readings of Brasian cultural production (Singh and Tatla, 2006; Sharma, 2006; K. Hall, 2002). He sees it as little more than posturing by judicious middle-class students and young professionals with whom he has little or nothing in common. However, the beauty and seductiveness of the Indian women he

encounters at these events and in the Bollywood films he reviews does “excite a lurking sense of Indianess in me” (p. 212). As at the college, his encounter with other Asians brings out aspects of his masculinity that he links to his ethnic background, yet this does not lead him to form meaningful relationships with the Indian women at the office: “A man could slaver over [an Indian woman] for months, without a sniff of pussy; then, out of the blue, she’d be engaged to some dickless geek her parents had fixed her up with. [...] Asian women will forego the fripperies of life – laughter, orgasms and excitement – for dreary, concrete certainty, just as their mothers have for centuries” (p. 214). For Puppy, then, the Brasian popular culture and values that he encounters at and through his work do not offer him a basis for identification or an opportunity to reconcile his Sikh-Punjabi upbringing with the influences of urban Britain.

After leaving *UK Asian*, Puppy works as a freelance journalist, reviewing CDs and writing about male grooming for men’s magazines. On one occasion he gets a larger commission to write a piece on a trendy fashion designer that Sophie is modeling for. “This was the biggest commission I’d had in a while and I didn’t want to blow it” (p. 90). He spends a morning at the designer’s studio trying fruitlessly to think of an angle for his piece until eventually giving up:

I sighed, closed the notepad and put it in my pocket. I wouldn’t take any notes. I would regurgitate the press releases Valeron had already sent me, and not bother finding new angles for the story. I’d fretted away the morning on the stupid hope of doing a good job; I now remembered that I never did a good job. Creativity, attention to

detail, fastidiousness and initiatives – the things that go into doing a good job – are things I don't have. (p. 92)

Yet his disinclination to do a good job is more than just lack of work ethic. Rather, he finds both the magazine he is working for and the “urban culture” it covers essentially inauthentic, catering to “nerdy White kids who move to London, change their hairstyles every year and believe the shit they read in style magazines” (p. 92). The designer and especially the fashion photographer, with his “practiced mockney” accent, are pretentious types with a “debauched mid-life penchant for young women” (p. 91). The rail thin models, Sophie included, are only too happy to “sully themselves in sordid, formless poses” (p. 94) for these men. Consequently, Puppy’s visit to the studio hardly motivates him to engage with his subject matter and produce an original feature. More than this, it is the latest in a string of professional spaces in which he is profoundly dislocated as a result of his inability to identify with, or in any way relate to, the urban cultures with which he engages through his work.

Leisure spaces

Much of the action of the novel occurs in what can be referred to collectively as leisure spaces, most commonly restaurants, bars, and clubs. In an effort to cover new ground, I will focus here primarily on two examples of spatial encounters that raise different issues of identity and belonging to those already discussed above. The first such example centers on a morning Puppy spends at a café patio on

Portobello Road in West London. In the novel, Portobello Road is depicted as an urban space where social and cultural difference overlaps and intersects. However, Puppy's description of Portobello Road could hardly be more different in tone than Dionne Brand's representation of spaces of intersecting social and cultural difference in Toronto, such as West Queen Street West and Kensington Market:

I looked from the café balcony onto Portobello Road. It was a miscegenist heaven: White women clung to well wrought ethnic studs who pushed tricycle pushchairs laden with fat brown babies; demure young White men guided Asian girlfriends through stalls selling hookahs, avant-garde sneakers and sun dried tomatoes.

The café was crowded, full of people drinking Spanish beer and eating parmesan and rocket salads, enjoying the pluralist esprit de corps of Notting Hill. I hated the area: a vapid, would-be bohemia, it was too fey for imagination and radicalism, but had odd pockets of deprivation, the remnants of the old West Indian quarter. It was home to the corporate rump of the creative media – scriptwriters, agents, marketing impresarios – and a hub for the under-belly of the English bourgeoisie: antique dealing heroin addicts, thespians-turned-coke-dealers, New Age charlatans selling Ayurveda to the upper classes. (p. 52)

Rather than being a progressive urban space where established categories of socio-cultural identity are disrupted and new criteria of belonging emerge, for Puppy, Portobello Road is little more than a space of liberal self-congratulation and exploitation. The mixed-race couples Puppy observes are represented as an expression of their own liberal values, especially those held by the White half of each pairing. Seated next to him at the café is a young couple reading newspaper articles on GM crops and Iranian art-house films; their “faces bore the idealism, the vague suicidal melancholy of White English liberalism” (p. 53). For Puppy, this

liberal ethic underpins the commoditization of difference by the creative industries associated with Portobello Road and stands in sharp contrast to his own perspective (which permeates the book) that the interaction of social and cultural difference in London is underscored by ethnic, racial and class conflict. As a result, he regards Portobello Road as an inauthentic facade of intercultural harmony that responds to upper class sensibilities and corporate commoditization while paving over the antagonisms that characterize multicultural London.

The second example concerns Puppy's routine visits to nightclubs. These clubs provide a venue for the performance of Puppy's gendered and sexual identity, which takes shape through the ways in which he negotiates his relation to, and difference from, women. Above all, the club is a space in which Puppy asserts his masculinity by seeking female sexual partners. Proficient in the codes and behaviours of clubbing culture⁴⁸, Puppy picks up women with seeming ease. "I gave her a smile, which she returned. I nodded, and she turned away into the crowd of dancers. She'd set her stall out; I'd catch up with her later" (p. 219). When he does so, he quickly sizes up what he sees as her physical attributes and flaws and concludes he "wouldn't have to put in too much work" (p. 221). The following morning he appreciates that she did not remember his name and remarks on how "a good dose of fresh pussy can lift a man's spirits" (p. 222). The club, then, is a space where Puppy engages with women on terms of emotional detachment and sexual desire. This may temporarily boost his confidence, but it is also one of many spatial

⁴⁸ See Malbon (1999) for a discussion of clubbing culture and practice.

interactions and encounters that limits his ability to form meaningful social relations in the city, as I will go on to conclude in the next section.

Leaving London

For Puppy, the spatial negotiation of a Brasian identity in downtown London provides an ambiguous basis for informal urban citizenship in the multicultural city. It is clear that, as an adult at least, Puppy is hardly an atomized figure, confused and helplessly trapped between monolithic cultural influences. Demonstrating personal agency, he successfully distances himself – literally and figuratively – from his traditional Sikh-Punjabi upbringing in Southall. Living in downtown London, he can, in many senses, be regarded as a cosmopolitan figure and competent urbanite, whose everyday life in the city sees him inhabit a variety of spaces that differ widely in terms of their ethno-racial, class and social composition. Many of these spaces are also characterized by the co-presence and interaction of multiple cultural groups. In these spaces he establishes social relations with a wide variety of people from a broad spectrum of London's population. While he may lack financial means, this is not attributable to lack of opportunity or to structural forces that circumscribe this socio-economic or spatial life in the city. He may lack personal motivation, but he is clearly intelligent and has no shortage of opportunities for professional advancement. Thus, in many respects, Puppy's London is a relatively boundless place in which he crosses socio-spatial boundaries as a matter of course in everyday life. Insofar as he lives his life across multiple forms of difference, he is

comparable to the principal second-generation characters in Brand's novel, all of whom refuse to be circumscribed by putative social and spatial boundaries in the city.

However, the crucial distinction between Dhaliwal's character and Brand's characters is that Puppy does not find 'community', or a basis for belonging, in his engagement with urban diversity. Instead, for him, everyday spaces and the relationships they engender act as a constant reminder of his own irreconcilable difference from the various social and cultural groups he encounters in the city. In addition, he does not regard urban spaces characterized by the fusion of cultures and the production of new urban identities in London as offering progressive contexts where he can redefine himself outside perennial categories of difference. Rather, to him, the urban identities he encounters in places such as Portobello Road (as well as the bhangra clubs and fashion studio among others) are ideologically infused spaces of consumption where style and image replace authentic cultural expression. Thus, above and beyond superficial encounters and exchanges, the city, for him, is a space of deeply rooted differences and antagonisms based on class, ethnic, racial, religious, gendered, sexual and more narrowly defined (sub)cultural constituencies. Indeed, this is the dominant image of the city we get from the novel. Consequently, Puppy's experience of London is characterized by a constant sense of inner displacement and disassociation from the urban spaces of everyday life in the city. This occurs despite an outward appearance of being perfectly at 'home' in the city.

While it is important to foreground that Puppy is not necessarily representative of individuals or a collective beyond the pages of the novel, his experiences cannot be dismissed as an isolated case with limited relevance to popular and academic conceptions of informal urban citizenship in multicultural London. To the contrary, Puppy's case reminds us that the multicultural city does not offer a facile avenue to belonging based on the quotidian trespass of socio-spatial boundaries or the intersection of cultural difference. In fact, as Puppy remarks on one occasion, "[i]f I'd lived by the ethos of my race, my life would have been different, so much better" (p. 151).⁴⁹ In Puppy's case, having a Brasian identity does not imply a progressive fusion of Asian, British and other cultural and sub-cultural influences that facilitates social insertion in multicultural London on his own terms. Instead, throughout the novel his urban identity is defined largely in negative terms as an inability to belong to Asian, British and other cultural formations – or indeed their various intersections – found in London. Being Brasian is thus a category of exclusion for Puppy, who describes himself as a "Tourist" (p. 85) insofar as he superficially engages with the city, but never becomes part of it in a meaningful way. As a result, informal urban citizenship remains partial and largely unrealized.

The negative impact of Puppy's status as an 'outsider' becomes increasingly apparent as the novel reaches its climax. Sitting despondently in Hyde Park on one occasion, he wonders to himself why:

⁴⁹ Here Puppy is referring to the work ethic of South-Asians in Britain and the financial independence that results.

Nothing I have ever wanted has come true; I was tired of being let down. I was tired of my lingering, lifelong sense of incompleteness. I'm a man of few talents; the one skill I have is the acceptance of disappointment. Nonetheless, I lay there feeling drained and beaten. I hadn't wanted much from life: love, safety, a sense of belonging to somewhere or someone. Instead, I had nothing. I listened to the people around me laughing and joking with one another: was anyone happy, or was everything a shroud, hiding one's mediocrity and sadness. (p. 162)

Later the same day, he looks out over the city and reflects:

I could see the red sun setting on the corner of the city. Several million people were out there, ploughing several million furrows. Barely a handful knew or cared anything about me. (p. 168)

We can conclude from these passages that the rather contemptuous remarks and attitudes Puppy exhibits toward the people he interacts with in the city are not the result of superficial cynicism, but rather of a more deep-seated sense of disconnection and absence of belonging. It is in the state of increasing despondency this causes, that Puppy seizes on an opportunity to escape London into a life of itinerant exile from which he narrates the events of the book.⁵⁰ In the taxi ride to Waterloo Station:

I turned to look through the rear window; I got a view of the embankment and Cleopatra's Needle, and was emptied by it. London had been my home for almost thirty years; I'd known nowhere else. She was the gorgeous, faithless whore that bore me; she'd never shown me any love, but had shown me the world and its workings. For that much, I was grateful. (p. 240)

⁵⁰ He is asked by a gay friend to deliver twenty thousand pounds to a lover that is on the run from the police for drug trafficking and people smuggling. Puppy agrees, but instead steals the money and hastily leaves Britain.

Puppy's remarks as he departs London reinforce the degree to which it is the city itself, and his experience of it, that has defined his identity and worldview. However, the fact that he was 'emptied' by this final view of London highlights his ultimate inability to achieve informal urban citizenship – to carve out a place for himself within the socio-spatial circuits of the city.

CHAPTER 6

From assertive identity to tenuous ‘front’: The spatial performance of Desi-Rudeboy identities in Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*

If, in *Tourism*, Puppy’s inhabitation of the city fails to generate a basis for collective belonging within multicultural London, the same cannot be said for Hardjit, Amit, Ravi and Jas, the four second-generation characters in Gautam Malkani’s debut novel, *Londonstani*. Rather, they exhibit what is arguably the strongest expression of group membership and shared identity in the city – the gang. In this regard, Malkani’s characters constitute a far more cohesive and bounded, not to mention exclusionary, type of community than the one represented in Brand’s novel. The gang that features in Malkani’s narrative is defined by what is termed a Desi-Rudeboy street culture, a unique form of Brasian identity. The adoption and spatial performance of a Desi-Rudeboy identity is the basis upon which Malkani’s characters position themselves within the urban public of Hounslow, the West London Suburb in which they all live. The success with which they appropriate space and territory for self-representation in Hounslow suggests that Desi-Rudeboy street culture is a powerful basis upon which to claim informal urban citizenship in London, albeit to the exclusion of social ‘Others’.

However, as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Desi-Rudeboy identity offers only a provisional and incomplete basis for informal urban citizenship. To begin with, its political currency is limited to Hounslow, a marginal suburb of west-London, outside of which it is revealed to be decidedly insular, dogmatic and generally out of touch with contemporary urban culture in the multicultural city. In addition, as a bold, confrontational form of youth self-affirmation, it invites being conditioned and disciplined by structures of authority, most notably parental. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the centrality of conspicuous consumption to cultivating a Desi-Rudeboy identity draws Malkani's characters into a high-stakes criminal operation that ultimately results in the loss of power, agency and symbolic capital accrued from being Desi-Rudeboys in Hounslow. Ultimately, then, there is a fundamental equivocality to the politics of this characteristically Brasian identity, which at once facilitates and limits the ability of the four characters to contest informal urban citizenship in multicultural London. It is precisely this duality that I wish to capture in my reading of the novel.

Desi-Rudeboys: The anatomy of a Brasian identity

In this section, I would like to outline how the novel represents Desi-Rudeboys as possessing a distinctive Brasian identity that forms a powerful basis for collective belonging in the multicultural city. As Jas', the novel's narrator, explains, the term Desi-Rudeboy is the latest in a long series of labels given to second-generation male youth of Indian origin in Britain:

People're always tryin to stick a label on our scene. That's the problem with havin a fuckin scene. First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits. These days we try an use our own word for homeboy an so we just call ourselves desis but I still remember when we were happy with the word rudeboy. (p. 5)

Indeed, throughout the novel the characters refer to themselves (and are referred to by others) as Desis (a Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi word that can be translated roughly as 'countryman') and Rudeboys (a term of Jamaican origin describing a tough, delinquent youth).⁵¹ Perhaps the important element to note is that both labels are self-ascribed and suggest a strong desire among the characters to define how their urban identity is labelled (a point that will be returned to below). As represented in *Londonstani*, Desi-Rudeboy youth culture is characterized by a number of elements, including their own linguistic vernacular, selective pop-culture affiliations, careful fashion choices, hyper-masculinity and homophobia, religious symbolism as well as a series of what are perceived to be opposing cultural forms.

The use of a vernacular street-talk is perhaps the most obvious feature of the Desi-Rudeboy identity. The centrality of language in this regard is elevated by the author's choice to compose dialogue that attempts to capture not only the lexicon, but also the grammar, accentuation, intonation and overall phonology of the vernacular attributed to his characters. In fact, the transliteration of street-talk into textual dialogue is perhaps the most striking feature of *Londonstani*, one that makes

⁵¹ On his website (<http://www.gautammalkani.com/>), author Gautam Malkani uses the two terms in conjunction – Desi Rudeboy. I have chosen to follow his lead throughout the essay.

language a key aspect of character subjectivity in the novel. The vernacular used by Malkani's characters is very much in keeping with the use of language observed by Harris (2006) among West London youth of South Asian origin – English dominance characterized by specifically London speech patterns mixed with Jamaican/Caribbean and North American influences as well as the selective incorporation of South Asian languages such as Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati.

The prevalence of 'London English' in the vernacular of Malkani's main characters can be discerned from the dialogue in a number of ways, including: Orthographical changes to words ending in 'er' (such that words like 'answer', 'after' and 'remember' become 'ansa', 'rememba' and 'afta') and 'ing' (such that 'being', 'throwing', 'bonding' become 'bein', 'throwin' and 'bondin'); the altered spelling of certain words ('what' becomes 'wot', 'enough' is 'enuf', 'something' is 'sumfink', 'them' is 'em'); as well as contractions such as 'a'ight' ('all right'), d'you ('do you') and 'wat'd' ('what did'). Jamaican and African-American influences in the vernacular lexicon are found in the repeated appearance of words such as 'blud', 'bredren' and 'bruv' (all three of which mean 'trusted friend'), 'dissin', ('disrespecting'), 'batty bwoy' ('gay man') and 'yard' ('house'), as well as the use of 'bucks' for pounds, 'feds' for police and 'bitches 'n ho's' as the term of choice for women. As O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) point out, the adoption of Black expressions such as these by British youth of different ethnicities can be regarded as a strategy of self-assertion and resistance through affiliation with the normalized figure of the bold, self-assured and impudent 'Black macho' (p. 6-7). The dialogue

of the second-generation characters is also peppered with (mostly derogatory) Punjabi and Urdu words such as 'gora' ('White person'), pehndu (literally 'villager' but used to denote a backward idiot), khota ('donkey'), bhanchod ('sister fucker') as well as more prosaic phrases such as 'ki dekh da payeh' ('what are you looking at'). The common Anglo-Indianism 'innit' is also ubiquitous in the novel's dialogue. Finally, a number of words are written in cell-phone English – 'for', 'to', 'be' and 'you' often appear in dialogue as '4', '2', 'b' and 'u' – lending a decidedly global lexicon to their speech patterns. Ultimately, this vernacular reveals a variety of cultural influences at play in shaping the Brasian identity of Malkani's characters.

Another defining element of this urban identity are the self-consciously selected pop-culture affiliations and fashion preferences of the four characters and their peers. In keeping with the spoken vernacular, their pop-culture affiliations reflect a mix of influences, the most salient being Black American music as well as Anglo-Indian Bhangra fusion. The soundtrack to their urban lives is dominated by mainstream Black American Rap, Hip Hop and R&B artists – including RMX, Ice Cube, Nelly, P Diddy, Usher and Beyonce – of which they receive a constant diet through the British-based MTV Base channel. Equally prevalent are British-Asian artists such as Juggy D, Punjabi MC, RDB and Punjabi Hit Squad all of whom fuse traditional Indian sound with contemporary urban forms such as Drum and Base, various genres of dance, R&B and Hip Hop. These are streamed into the bedrooms of Malkani's characters through B4U music, their other preferred pop-culture channel.

In terms of fashion preferences, expensive designer brands are absolutely *de rigueur* and coveted as prized possessions. References to products made by Dolce & Gabbana, Versace, Ted Baker, Evisu, Schott, Hugo Boss, Cecil Gee, Prada, Reiss, Patrick Cox, Moschino, Kenzo and other such brands are littered throughout the text. The ultimate fashion accessories are fully outfitted cars (BMW's are the preferred make) and the latest, most technologically advanced cell phone. Through these fashion and pop-culture choices, Malkani's characters quite literally brand their urban identity in such a way that how they present themselves to the world around them is self-consciously and purposely tied to the commoditized forms of culture they consume.⁵² At the same time, fashion and pop-culture are used to identify cultural 'others' against which they define themselves through negative association. This includes people who wear Levi's 501s, drive sub-compacts, watch the BBC, and listen to Britpop bands (exemplified by Coldplay, Radiohead and Oasis) or the sort of Desi music 'goras' and 'coconuts' prefer (exemplified by Badmarsh & Shri, Talvin Singh and Nitin Sawhney). The music phobias in particular reveal a desire among the characters to separate themselves from the mainstream cultural preferences of White Britain.

Another defining feature of the urban culture depicted by Malkani is a pervasive hypermasculinity. This hypermasculinity is evidenced in part by an obsessive preoccupation with cultivating what they interpret as a quintessentially masculine image (or 'front' as Jas calls it) through the fashion choices discussed above. It is

⁵² The broader implications of this will reveal themselves below.

also evident in Hardjit's commitment to achieving the ideal male body through ceaseless bodybuilding, the results of which are the envy of his peers. Yet nowhere is it more evident than in the characters' (conflicted) attitude toward women. On one hand, women are referred to as "bitches n hos" (p. 20) (in keeping with lyrics of Black American Rappers and Hip Hop artists) and regarded in terms of almost pornographic sexual desire and masculine conquest. Comments such as "...if yours lot wanna see proper fitness you shulda seen this bitch I shagged last weekend" (p. 20) permeate the dialogue of the main characters along with references to their sexual prowess and size of their members. Yet, on the other hand, and in sharp contrast, women are also seen as repositories of purity and honour that needs protecting. This is especially so for Hardjit, whose view of women, as Jas points out, is particularly contradictory:

Hardjit sometimes gets pretty vexed bout that kind a shit. Porn, hookers, slutty ladies. Other times he'll be laughin along, actin like a pimp. Honest to God, one minute he's talking bout how he's gonna get inside some desi girl's lace kachhian an the next minute he's acting as if a girl's gotta be a virgin if she wants to be a proper desi. Fuck knows why sometimes he'll act one way an other times he'll act the other way. Could be he's only OK bout it when it's obvious we're only chatting bullshit or fantasizing or someshit. [...] You in't allowed to fantasize bout blatant sluts like porn stars cos desi girls in't meant to be into that kind a thing. (p. 53)

As I discuss momentarily, religion and associated cultural values certainly account for part of the contradiction apparent here. However, the salient point at this stage is that a strain of hypermasculinity and patriarchy underpins both perspectives,

given that in either case gender relations involve men defining what is considered socially appropriate behaviour for women.

The hypermasculinity of the main characters is reinforced by a pervasive homophobia through which they position themselves as the binary opposite to anyone or anything they perceive as somehow homosexual or effeminate. For instance, Jas, who, despite his best efforts since joining the gang, has yet to acquire a fully fledged rudeboy front, is constantly being labelled homosexual by those around him, often in a way that reinforces their own masculinity. For example, in an attempt to legitimize his own overactive desire for women, Ravi argues that it is “[b]etter’n bein a skinny batty bwoy like Jas here, innit. He probly got a stash a gay porn. *Bud Bud Batties* or sumfink, innit. Dat’s if there is a mag for batty desi’s” (p. 55). A teacher who tries to engage them outside of classes is “a batty looking for an afterschool fuck” (p. 129) and so forth. Lack of physical presence, bookishness, intelligence, musical and media tastes, the use of certain words and expressions as well as a number of other traits (most of which could have been formerly associated with Jas) are all seized upon at various points in the dialogue as signs of homosexuality from which the characters seek to distance themselves. Similarly, aggressiveness, or the lack thereof, is seen as a dividing line between masculinity and effeminate homosexuality, as evidenced in Hardjit’s response to Amit’s suggestion that perhaps they should lay off beating a White boy on the ground in front of them: “Wat da fuck’s wrong wid’chyu, pehndu? U turnin into a batty boy wid all a dis let’s-make-peace-an-drink-spunk-lassi-shit?” (p. 10). Thus, homosexuality,

or at least the perception thereof, is a key element against which they define their urban identity.

Finally, we come to the role of religion in the urban culture of Malkani's second-generation characters. Hardjit (Sikh), Amit or Ravi (Hindu), nor indeed any of their peers that make up the small secondary cast of characters, take part in formal religious observance. Having said this, religion plays a central role in their urban culture and identity as a marker of fundamental difference between themselves and other groups in the city. Before elaborating on this point, it is important to foreground that, despite different religious backgrounds Hardjit, Amit and Ravi associate freely with each other (as do their parents), partly because of perceived commonalities between them:

Sikhs an Hindus fought side by side in all them wars. Both got beef with Muslims. Both support India at cricket. Both be listenin to bhangra, even though Sikh bredren clearly dance better to it. (p. 81)

In his role as narrator, Jas explains to the reader that, in Hounslow at least, Hindus sometimes blend their religion with Sikhism and, albeit to a lesser extent, the reverse is true as well. Thus, at least within the narrative economy of the novel, these two religious categories are mutually inclusive rather than exclusive. Jas, who is presumably of Protestant background, is only provisionally accepted into the group because he has elected to abide by their cultural values (religiously rooted and otherwise). Indeed, when he diverts from these values as the plot reaches its climax, he immediately becomes an outcast among his former peers.

The degree to which religion is an important criterion for difference is evidenced in the rivalry between Sikh youth (with their Hindu allies) and Muslim youth in West London. At one point in the text, Jas explains the violent history of gang rivalry between the two groups in West London and claims that although the levels of animosity may have dropped in recent years, deep-seated divisions persist. These divisions are most obvious in the distaste Amit, Ravi, and especially Hardjit feel toward the idea of inter-religious liaisons – “We best all stick to our own kinds, boy, don’t you b playin wid fire” (p. 49), declares Amit when Jas comments on the beauty of a Muslim girl. This proscription extends beyond relations between Sikhs/Hindus and Muslims to all forms of inter-religious and inter-racial relations: “[if Hardjit] weren’t psycho enough bout Sikhs or Hindus getting with Muslims, when it comes to goras getting with desis it’s like you’re talking bout goras gang-bangin his mum. The man just din’t have a sense a humour bout mixed couples, even when one time he declared: - Dey can take our food, but dey can never take our women. ...” (p. 145). Hardjit goes on to declare that “we shud all breed apart” (p. 146). Perhaps more than anything, Hardjit’s attitude is deeply patriarchal, yet he justifies it based on a perception of fundamental religious difference. Interestingly, Malkani portrays his second-generation characters as far more preoccupied with questions of religious difference than their parents, who, on a number of occasions, are depicted as being less concerned with such matters, and if anything, more tolerant of other faiths (see p. 49, p. 83, p. 221, p. 251-2).

A discussion of the various facets of the Desi-Rudeboy identity associated with Malkani's characters reveals it to be an essentially hybrid mix of cultural forms encountered in multicultural London and circulated by global pop-culture. Granted, ethnicity and religion continue to be important aspects of their subjectivity, but the complex fusion of multiple influences and perspectives makes this a characteristically Brasian identity that transcends 'traditional' categories of belonging. However, in this case, the result can hardly be termed progressive. Rather, as we have seen, Desi-Rudeboy culture is fraught with socially intolerant and exclusionary attitudes including homophobia, hyper-masculinity and patriarchy, religious intolerance, and rampant consumerism to name but a few. Despite, or perhaps because of this, it nonetheless offers Malkani's four protagonists a clear basis upon which to instantiate themselves within the urban public of West London. Crucially, the political potential of the identity in this regard is actualized through the performance of urban spaces, as we shall see in the following section.

Contesting urban citizenship: The spatial performance of the Desi-Rudeboy identity

Next, I would like to consider how the political currency of the Desi-Rudeboy identity is actualized through the way it is performed in the public spaces of Hounslow. Indeed, public posturing and display, as well as (often violently) confronting social 'Others', is represented as central to being a Desi-Rudeboy. Rooted in an assertive street culture, this identity requires the appropriation of urban space and territory as a platform for self-representation as well as the imposition of power over other social

groups in the neighbourhood. Thus, Malkani's characters affirm their identity through a performative mobilization of urban space that can be read as a process of claiming urban citizenship in West London. Aggression, violence and the threat thereof are central to this process as evidenced by the following examples that elucidate the spatial politics of the Desi-Rudeboy identity under consideration.

Cruisin' the street

The first example revolves around Malkani's description of the four main characters cruising the vicinity of Hounslow High Street in Ravi's "pimped up" BMW M3 (p. 14). Sitting in the back seat, Jas describes the image that Hardjit and company are projecting to the world around them:

Windin down the tinted electric window, resting his elbow on the door frame, flashin his Tag Heuer, sovereign ring an karha bracelet. Grabbin the top a the door frame with his left hand, he straightened his shoulder so that his upper arm snapped into place, his tight Black D&G vest giving everyone outside an even better view. An just like the empty side roads gave Ravi an excuse to slide down into second gear an do some seriously sharp rudeboy manoeuvres, they gave Hardjit an excuse to grip harder on the door frame an tense his arms up more. The engine an drivetrain connected to his biceps, the brake pads connected to his pecs. Ravi swervin past some random slowcoach Citroën like he was at the arcades playin Daytona USA. Beep beep, get the fuck off the street. [...] Her legs had come into view soon as we'd turned out the side roads an onto the London Road. Whoever she was, she was wearin one a them fuck-me miniskirts an fuck-me-harder knee-high boots. [...] Ravi slowed the fuck down now while Hardjit turned up DMX's 'Ruff Ryders Anthem' with the arm that weren't on display in the door frame. Soon as we'd passed her legs, Amit gives it. (p. 19)

Cruising central Hounslow in this way, the characters put their urban identity – with its particular fashion choices, musical preferences, hyper masculinity and so forth – clearly on display. Furthermore, by intimidating other drivers and acting lasciviously toward the girl on the sidewalk, they impose themselves on the public spaces around them, claiming power over them.

Things escalate when another youth of Indian descent pulls up beside them at a red light in a Peugeot 305:

You could tell from his long hair, grungy clothes, the poncey novel an newspaper on his dashboard an Coldplay album playin in his car that he was a muthafuckin coconut. So White he was inside his brown skin, he probably talked like those gorafied desis who read the news on TV. (p. 21)

Having identified an individual who embodies many of the very traits against which they define themselves, Hardjit, and Amit immediately start provoking the man, challenging him to look them in the eye. When he attempts to ignore them, both Hardjit and Amit lay into vitriolic tirades:

Wat's wrong wid'chyu, sala kutta? U 2 embarrass'd to b a desi? Embarrass'd a your own culture, huh? Thing is, u is actually an embarrassment to desis. Bet'chyu can't even speak yo mother tongue, innit. I should come over there n cut yo tongue out, u dickless bhanchod. [...] Look at me when I talk to 2 u. Ain't nobody mess wid us. Fuckin R.E.M. playin on yo stereo. Ras clat pehndu. Tell him, Amit. (p. 22)

And

Bhanchod coconut, Amit goes after openin his window. – In't your own culture good enuf for you, you fuckin gora lover? [...] Take some advice from me, don't mess wid us. Cos we b da man round here n you b da gora-lovin bhanchod who can't even speak his mother tongue, innit. Wat's wrong wid your own bredren, brown boy? Look at us. We's b havin a nice car, nice tunes, nuff nice designer gear, nuff bling mobile. But no, you wanna b some gora-lovin, dirrty hippie wid fuckin Radiohead playin in your car. (p. 22-3)

This episode further emphasizes the dominance these characters seek to exert over the public spaces of Hounslow, in this case through abuse and intimidation. It also reveals a preoccupation of the part of Hardjit, Amit and company with asserting their identity as a form of resistance to mainstream British culture, which they perceive to have 'infected' the unfortunate man that pulled up beside them.

In fact, being a Desi-Rudeboy is offered in the novel as a way of overcoming the marginalization their parents experienced when they immigrated to Britain:

I remember back in da day when most desis round here were like dat gimp, goes Amit. – Skinny saps pretendin like they were gora so no one treat'd dem like dey'd just got off da boat from Bombay, innit. But all da gora fuck'd wid dem anyway. (p. 23)

According to the narrator, with the emergence of a robust, assertive Desi-Rudeboy culture, there "in'n no desi needin to kiss the White man's butt these days an you definitely don't need to actually act like a gora" (p. 23). He goes on to explain how failing to assert their identity is a sure way for Hounslow's second-generation youth to end up working in nearby Heathrow airport, "helping goras catch planes to places they could turn their own skin brown" (p. 23). Becoming Desi-Rudeboys, then, is at

least partly a means of avoiding a lifetime of subservience to Britain's White middle classes. Any one of their peers who fails to buy into this, detracts from the resistance being mounted and is thus perceived as a legitimate target for abuse.

Claiming respect

The second example, this one taken from the first chapter of the book, further elaborates on the relationship between identity, the control of public space and resistance. *Londonstani* opens in the empty sports field of a local high school where Hardjit is violently and repeatedly kicking a White youth, as Amit, Ravi and Jas stand by shouting encouragement. The ostensible reason for this beating is a seemingly groundless rumour that the person in question referred to Hardjit as a 'Paki'. Hardjit punctuates the beating by explaining to the White youth that neither he nor his friends are from Pakistan, which gives him no right to call them Pakis, even if they refer to themselves as such on occasion:

A Paki is someone who comes from Pakistan. Us bredren who don't come from Pakistan can still be call'd Paki by other bredrens if it means we can call dem Paki in return. But u people ain't allow'd 2 join in, u get me? (p. 7)

In this way, Hardjit violently proclaims his right to self-representation in the public realm, which historically required Indian youth to become "gorafied" (p. 23) if they were to avoid public abuse.

As the White youth becomes increasingly bloodied and the beating decreases in intensity, Hardjit adds fuel to the fire by spontaneously and baselessly accusing the White youth of disrespecting his mother ("U b disrespectin my mother?" p. 10). This spurs renewed intensity into his blows, which, as Jas describes, are interspersed with such commentary as: "U fuckin gora, u cuss'd my mum, and then adding variations like, – U cuss'd my sister an ma bredren. U cuss'd my dad, my uncle Deepak, u cuss'd my aunty Sheetal, my aunty Meera, ma cusins in Leicester, u cuss'd ma grandad in Jalandhar" (p. 11). An affirmation of the right to self-representation thus mutates rapidly into a demand for respect and even submission from the broader cultural constituency represented by the bloodied youth on the ground. One might even read Hardjit's actions as a misplaced form of retribution for a history of colonial exploitation between Britain and India. Either way, public beatings such as these allow Malkani's characters to simultaneously claim presence and demand deference from White youth by exerting dominance over the public spaces and public sphere of Hounslow. The sum effect is that:

These days, lager louts had more to fear from us than us lot had to fear from them. Honest to god, in pinds like Hounslow an Southall, they feared us even more than they feared Black kids. Round some parts, even Black kids feared people like us. (p. 5)

By demonstrating the kind of assertiveness more commonly associated with Black youth, the passage represents Desi-Rudeboys as having effectively appropriated a corner of London as their own territory in the city. Here, they have the power to define who and what is considered marginal.

In the name of God and India

The third and final example revolves around the very public struggles between Sikh/Hindu and Muslim second-generation male youth over power, dominance and territory in Hounslow. Unsurprisingly, Hardjit and company play a central role in this conflict. On one occasion, described in detail over several chapters (8-10), Hardjit takes part in an organized fight against a Muslim youth named Tariq, the catalyst being an accusation that Tariq tried to convert a Sikh girl to Islam. This, of course, violates Hardjit's proscription against inter-ethnic and inter-religious liaisons and he takes it upon himself to uphold the girl's 'honour'. In his capacity as narrator, Jas suggests that accusations such as the one made against Tariq are generally unfounded or fabricated by the girl to avoid retribution for having been with a Muslim ("The desi version a waking up in the morning an thinking, Oh fuck, I best say he raped me. Its not my fault, he brainwashed me into his religion. I said no, please no, but he forced it into me" [p. 80]). Despite this, they are nonetheless accepted as common pretexts for rekindling long standing animosities and territorially rooted power struggles between the two groups.

On the day of the fight, which is being held at an abandoned BMX track on the outskirts of Hounslow, there is an audience of around thirty people, including a group of girls who have come to watch Hardjit perform, members of another Desi gang, a crew of Black youth from neighbouring Brentford, a group of Somali kids (who are introduced as rivals to the local Desi-Rudeboys) and a random assortment

of others. For maximum effect, Hardjit makes a choreographed entrance into this scene, wearing a carefully chosen outfit and an orange headband⁵³ to complement the other markers of Sikhism that adorn him: a Khanda symbol tattoo on his arm and a Karha bangle worn around his wrist. He is fighting, observes Jas, in the “name of god” (p. 106). His adversary, Tariq, shows up wearing a green and yellow Pakistan cricket top, which frames the conflict not only in terms of religious difference, but also competing national affiliations between India and Pakistan. When the fight gets underway, it quickly becomes clear that Hardjit, with years of martial arts training, is the superior fighter. The fight only prolongs itself because Hardjit chooses to toy with his adversary in front of the assembled crowd, although the desired effect is lost as it becomes increasingly apparent that Tariq is unable to muster much of a challenge:

It's hard to keep things level when Tariq's such a dickless pussy, not even realising he's just being played with. [...] When people like Tariq don't fight properly it makes you want to beat them even more for being such pussies. If you hit them harder they might fight back. Stupid fucking gimps deserve to have the shit beaten outta them anyway. People who don't fight back properly are like people who don't fight at all. They're like desi dads when they stand there takin all kinds a abuse an shit from smelly skinheads, racist bosses an our mums. (p. 110)

Fighting, then, is once again offered as a key method of collective self-assertion, a way of claiming a dominant social position within the multicultural world of West London. Indeed, in the hierarchically perceived order of cultural groupings in West

⁵³ Orange being the colour traditionally associated with Sikhism.

London, one's position is defined and redefined by the ability to exert power and control over the spaces and territories of everyday life, partly through violent confrontation. In this way, much coveted 'respect' is attained and the deference and fear experienced by the generation of immigrants is expunged.

The Desi-Rudeboy 'front' and the limits of informal urban citizenship

By adopting and asserting a Desi-Rudeboy identity in the public spaces of Hounslow, Malkani's characters not only instantiate themselves within, but exert dominance over the socio-spatial milieu of Hounslow. As such, they can be seen as aggressively claiming informal urban citizenship. However, it becomes increasingly apparent as the novel progresses that their claim to informal urban citizenship is both provisional and ambiguous. There are a number of reasons for this. To begin with, the suburb of Hounslow, their space for self-representation and public affirmation, is depicted in the novel as a marginal urban space – little more than a drab, uninspiring dormitory for the South Asian staff of Heathrow airport and the surrounding warehouses. Much of it is downright dire with "news agents, halal kebab shops an minicab companies with Special Autumn Airport Fares" (p. 89) competing for space in an almost dystopic carscape:

It's just one car park after another round here: grey field a empty spaces, concrete bollards, those giant bins for shop rubbish, a couple a crap cars an pay-an-display ticket machines bolted onto their posts with extra padlocks. The graffiti on the walls says things like 'Shere Punjab', 'Wild Apaches, Boyo Woz Ere', 'Fuck Your Mom' an 'Goods Vehicles and Permit Holders Only'. Welcome to

the London Borough a Hounslow, car park capital a the world. (p. 88)

Such are the urban spaces of everyday life for the main characters. They struggle to assert themselves over a marginal urban geography, one that is of minimal concern to all but other insular gangs of local youths who, like Hardjit. Amit, Ravi and Jas, have yet to accomplish a much desired move away from Hounslow. In the meantime, they fight each other over control of this space in derelict, overgrown fields strewn with litter. When the police show up to enact the tired ritual of breaking up the violence – as they do in the case of Hardjit and Tariq’s fight – Jas muses that they need to find a “new venue” (p. 112) for their Rudeboy activities. However, it turns out that they have few options: “...we couldn’t go south cos that was Richmond. Too swanky, too poncey. To the west was Brentford, but that was going the way a Richmond now. To the north it belonged to the Southall Desis and all the land to the west had anti-terrorist police cos a Heathrow airport – an those muthas got guns” (p. 112). In effect, they are confined to Hounslow.

Even within Hounslow, the performance of an authentic Desi-Rudeboy “front” (p. 5) and the concomitant claims to urban space are hampered by both the urban authorities and, to an even greater extent, by their culturally defined place in the hierarchy of extended Indian families. In the first instance, the transformation and policing of urban space are depicted as progressively curtailing the ability of Malkani’s characters to publically project their urban identity. For example, lamenting the recent pedestrianisation of Hounslow High Street, Jas questions

rhetorically “how us rudeboys s’posed to cruise down the High Street if there in’t no fucking road to cruise on, eh?” (p. 88). On another occasion, Jas notes how many of the local Desi-Rudeboys are reduced to congregating at a curb side bus stop because the security guards at the Treaty Centre (the local shopping mall) routinely exclude them from the premises for loitering.

In the second instance, it is their parents and extended families who pose the biggest threat to the integrity of their Desi-Rudeboy front. Malkani’s second-generation characters are all extremely deferent and appeasing toward their parents and older members of their extended families. It would appear that this is partly due to the internalization of a rigid cultural maxim – “gotta respect your elders, innit” (p. 78) – and partly because they live at home and are dependent on their parents for virtually all their basic needs.⁵⁴ Within the family home, their public identity as fully fledged Desi-Rudeboys is transformed into a domestic identity of cosseted, yet hyper-regulated teenagers who are powerless to resist their intrusive, domineering, and, in Amit’s case, downright neurotic, . When this domestic identity interferes with the identity they cultivate in the public spaces of Hounslow, their social position within the neighbourhood becomes threatened. Having said this, the use of mobile phones to some degree allays this threat by allowing their mothers to check up on them, request items from the shop, or simply demand they return home without

⁵⁴ All four characters are re-taking their A-Levels after failing their last year of high school.

overly compromising their public persona.⁵⁵ The following passage illustrates the case in point:

He's being all polite an in't using no swear words or nothing so is clearly chattin to his mum. But he makes sure he don't *look* like he's chattin to his mum, narrowin his eyes, suckin in his cheecks an noddin as he stares out the window. Amit pulled a better fone face then all a us. Tellin some stockbroker or banker to liquidate his portfolio a stocks and, no, he din't give a damn how bad the market is today: just fuckin sell. (p. 16 emphasis in original)

If anything, Amit strategically transforms speaking to his mother into an opportunity to reinforce his Desi-Rudeboy image. However, dodging authority figures in public is not always so easy as the following example suggests.

On one occasion, as Amit dutifully fulfills his mother's request to pick up a list of items from the local drugstore (including lavender oil, bodyform sanitary napkins, lipstick, and laxatives), he notices that the checkout counter is staffed by the beautiful Sonia Guha. In an effort to uphold his masculinity, Amit fills his shopping basket with expensive male products (shaving razors, deodorant, protein shakes, and extra large Durex condoms) in the hope that she won't notice the other products he is buying for his mother, which he fears will make him appear effeminate or gay. Once at the checkout counter, the approach seems be working until a voice from behind him shouts; "Amit, vot is this gandh you buying? [...] Vot is this Durex you

⁵⁵ As Jas remarks: "Havin the blingest mobile fone in the house is a rudeboy's birthright. Not just for style, but also cos fones were invented for rudeboys. They free you from your mum an dad while still allowing your parents to keep tabs on you" (p. 41).

buying? Wait till I tell your mama" (p. 96). The voice belongs to one "Auntyji Narinder", who proceeds to inspect his shopping basket as Amit desperately tries to convince her that he is actually shopping for his parents. Ignoring him, she begins to praise his choice of lavender oil ("...verry good. Will help you be less anxious about your studies like you were last time" [p. 96]) and arguing against the merits of laxatives ("if you feeling constipation just drink prune juice" (p. 96). Needless to say, Amit's Rudeboy front comes crashing down before Sonia and he beats a hasty retreat from the store. While evidently intended to be a humorous interlude, this passage nonetheless illustrates how the potentially emancipatory process of self-definition associated with the public performance of a Desi-Rudeboy identity is tempered by various forces – familial, authoritative – that place limits on the everyday inhabitation of public space by Malkani's second-generation characters. It also reveals the fragility of the Desi-Rudeboy image as a basis for informal urban citizenship.

Perhaps the best example of the provisional and incomplete basis for informal urban citizenship offered by the performance of a Desi-Rudeboy identity in Hounslow can be drawn from the series of events that are set into motion following the break-up of the fight between Hardjit and Tariq by the police. As the police are about to make their arrests, a high school teacher by the name of Mr. Ashwood, who formerly taught Hardjit, Amit, Ravi and Jas, opportunely intercedes on their behalf and manages to avert the arrest. The idealistic Mr. Ashwood, who is keen to help his former students become more socially engaged, then offers them the option of

either meeting with him on a weekly basis to discuss their views on multicultural Britain or being handed back to the police. The latter option would also entail Mr. Ashwood informing the police of what he knows about a small time operation the gang runs reprogramming mobile phones for acquaintances who wish to switch network providers and for business associates who want to render jacked and stolen phones untraceable. When the boys refuse ("Forget it, man, dis politics shit, it all bout poncey, grey-haired bald people talking posh n getting off wid their secretaries, man" [p. 130]), the exasperated Mr. Ashwood offers them a final option: to meet with a successful former student of his, Sanjay, in the hope that he might encourage them to become more ambitious and socially engaged. The alternative being even less desirable, the four reluctantly agree to head into Knightsbridge in central London for a meeting with a man that sounds to them like the "king a da coconuts" (p. 131).

Sanjay turns out to be anything but the 'batty coconut' they expected. His flat, with its designer furniture and state-of-the-art electronics, and personal fashion choices, leave the gang of four in a state of near awe. It quickly transpires that, unbeknownst to Mr. Ashwood, Sanjay is hardly the model citizen he had arranged for them to meet, but rather a self-interested business man who sees an opportunity for himself in what he has heard of the gang's involvement in reprogramming stolen mobile phones. On their first meeting, Sanjay offers to pay them premium rates to supply him with stolen mobile phones sourced from their contacts in Hounslow, without even requiring them to be reprogrammed. The terms of the deal are so

inexplicably favourable to them, that the gang become suspicious and reluctant to accept. Sanjay sets about convincing them by pointing out that the particular urban youth culture according to which they define themselves – based as it is on conspicuous consumption and public display – effectively leaves them with little choice but to accept his offer of easy money.

This lifestyle, these material possessions, this is how you big yourself up, as they say. You will forever be judged and judge yourself by your luxury consumerist aspirations, your nice stuff. And if you stop trying to big yourself up, others around you will make you look small pretty quickly, believe me. So as a dear friend of mine once said, you can never have enough bling. (p. 168)

Sanjay then launches into a lecture on what he terms 'Bling-Bling Economics', the substance of which is that individuals whose urban social identity centres on a culture of consumption require ever increasing monetary capital to simply sustain, let alone build, symbolic capital based on their chosen identity. Thus, in order to sustain their Rudeboy identity and the power over self-definition that comes with it, the four agree to supply Sanjay with stolen phones. They do so despite being aware that, as their customer, he now controls the flow of money that is so central to actualizing their urban identity.

At first, the new source of income increases their Desi-Rudeboy profile in Hounslow, both by allowing them to cultivate their chosen public image through unrestricted consumption (p. 173) and by giving them customer power over an extended network of individuals and gangs from whom they source stolen mobiles for Sanjay (p. 182).

Their increased income also allows them to engage in a display of masculinity and patriarchy by accumulating 'rakhis' (p. 175) as part of the ongoing Hindu and Sikh festival of Diwali. As represented by Malkani's narrator Jas, a rakhi is a thread tied on a man's wrist by a girl in exchange for money and a symbolic vow to uphold her honour. Within the cultural economy of Malkani's characters, the growing collection of rakhis on their respective wrists constitutes a valued expression of their masculine authority in Hounslow (p. 176).

In addition to increasing their public profile in Hounslow, associating with Sanjay gives Malkani's four second-generation characters access to exclusive, cosmopolitan spaces in downtown London, spaces that are a world away from the marginal West London Suburb of Hounslow. Yet, access to such spaces does not translate into the actualization of upward mobility on the part of the characters, revealing more of the limitations than the possibilities offered by their Desi-Rudeboy identity when it comes to social positioning in the multicultural city. For example, in the expensive clubs to which Sanjay introduces them, they exhibit a near embarrassing lack of knowledge concerning behavioural protocol (chapter 17). In addition, the intolerant, exclusionary attitudes held by Hardjit and the others are revealed as distinctly recidivist and parochial, given the multiple expressions of progressive cultural fusion that now surround them in central London. For example, at one exclusive club they find themselves listening to Arabic fusion music, which of course contravenes their sense of Muslims as consummate Others, rivals for power and territory in the city. Furthermore, despite their fancy clothes,

designer haircuts and carefully choreographed male posturing, they are unable to pick up women for want of a place to take them afterward. Thus, being a Desi-Rudeboy carries far less currency in the cosmopolitan spaces of central London than it does in the working class Hounslow. Indeed, a spatial reading of the novel reveals that the ability of the main characters to contest informal urban citizenship in London does not extend evenly across the metropolis, but rather remains place specific.

Ultimately, access to the cosmopolitan spaces of central London is short-lived for Malkani's characters, as their arrangement with Sanjay unravels, revealing the degree to which their agency as Desi-Rudeboys has been compromised by participating in the scheme. The arrangement comes to an end because Jas, bolstered by his increased status, takes the ill-fated decision to make advances on, and briefly date, a beautiful Muslim girl from Hounslow named Samira. When this becomes public knowledge, not only is Jas immediately cast out by his former friends (for whom inter-ethnic liaisons are of course taboo), but the affair also causes a serious escalation in the Muslim-Sikh/Hindu animosities in the area. As a result, many of the gang's suppliers no longer want to be associated with Jas' former crew and so delivery of stolen phones to Sanjay becomes impossible. At this point, Sanjay reveals that he needs the phones as part of an elaborate VAT carousel fraud (a form of sales tax fraud) he is perpetrating⁵⁶ and threatens them

⁵⁶ VAT carousel fraud is a means through which organized crime is able to defraud the government of sales taxes by claiming rebates on goods that are continually

into continuing his supply by robbing a mobile phone distribution warehouse near Heathrow Airport owned by Jas' father. The characters are therefore forced into a desperate criminal act to fulfill a commitment that, once satisfied, will be dissolved, leaving them without the income necessary to actualize the Desi-Rudeboy identity. Moreover, they will have lost the accumulated social capital and influence in Hounslow necessary to ensure new streams of money in the underground economy.

The evolution of the novel's plot reveals how the adoption and spatial performance of a Desi-Rudeboy identity, whilst initially offering a seemingly strong basis for contesting urban citizenship, is, in fact, fraught with ambiguities and limitations in this regard. Granted, being Desi-Rudeboys allows Malkani's characters to claim urban space and territory for self-representation in Hounslow. In so doing, they exert considerable agency over social positioning in West London. However, Hounslow, as we saw, is represented in the novel as little more than a marginal space on the periphery of London whose horizons the characters find constraining. Even here, their ability to instantiate themselves in the social world of the neighbourhood depends on constantly (and often violently) asserting their identity in public space, a task that is conditioned by various figures of authority. Moreover, the need for a constantly increasing source of income to sustain the identity upon which their position in the neighbourhood is based, leads them into a risky criminal scheme whose outcome undermines the social and symbolic capital they have circulated between jurisdictional boundaries. The substance of the scheme Sanjay is perpetrating is described in detail between pages 310-314.

accrued by being Desi-Rudeboys in Hounslow. Insofar as it introduces them to new spaces in central London, participation in this scheme also reveals how the political currency of their urban identity is devalued outside of West London. Consequently, informal urban citizenship for Malkani's characters remains provisional, incomplete and largely restricted to a marginal space on the periphery of the metropolis.

CHAPTER 7

The representation of Brasian identities and informal urban citizenship in London: Equivocal interventions into the politics of cultural pluralism

Over the past two chapters we have seen how the spatial production and negotiation of Brasian identities, as represented in both *Tourism* and *Londonstani*, act as an ambiguous or equivocal basis for informal urban citizenship in multicultural London. There may be significant differences between the novels in terms of the Brasian identities depicted and their relationship to informal urban citizenship, but the underlying commonality described remains salient. In this final chapter, I would like to consider the broader significance and relevance of this particular representation of Brasian identities and their cultural politics. In particular, my intention is to assess how the novels – through my reading of them – contribute to current scholarly and indeed public debates on cultural pluralism in Britain. In order to do so, I begin by reviewing literature that discusses the power relations and politics of difference underpinning the growth of ethnic and racial diversity in Britain during the second half of the twentieth century. I use this literature to identify the discursive production of a national imaginary that is underscored by essentialized ethnic and racial divisions that double as boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. I then engage with scholarship that describes how the emergence of diasporic and especially second-generation identities in British cities challenges this national

imaginary and requires it to be fundamentally reconfigured. Here, in order to avoid generalizations and to align my contextualization as closely to the novels as possible, I concentrate specifically on scholarship about second-generation British youth of South Asian descent and the subversive politics of the Brasian identities associated with them. Having laid the essential ground work, I spend the remainder of the chapter considering the particular contribution of the novels under analysis to these broader discussions that spill over from academia and into public life in Britain.

The national story and its outsiders

In contrast to Canada, where a discourse of multiculturalism has been prominent since the early 1970s, the ethnic and racial diversification of British society has not been framed by a dominant master narrative. Rather, cultural pluralism in Britain “has evolved as an unplanned, incremental process – a matter of multicultural drift, rather than conscious policy” (Parekh, 2000, p. 15; see also S. Hall, 2000). That being said, the trajectory of this ‘drift’ has been guided by powerful undercurrents that have shaped how post-colonial immigrants and their offspring are discursively inserted into the British nation. A useful starting point for a discussion on the topic is the landmark report, subsequently published as a book, entitled *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2000), but known more widely as The Parekh Report after the

chair of The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain that produced the document.⁵⁷

The Parekh Report describes the contours of a British narrative of nationhood that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries and was ultimately cemented in the first half of the 20th century. In a formula seen elsewhere across the world, this 'national story' coheres around a series of elements including historical figures and events (arranged to create a narrative of inexorable evolution towards a unified present), institutions (such as the monarchy, parliament), religion (Protestantism), language (English), ideals (such as scientific rationalism), geographies (the iconic rural landscapes of the British Isles), cultural production (literature, painting) and a host of cultural symbols, codes, traits and behaviours that together reflect and reproduce an 'imagined community', to use Benedict Anderson's popular term. The national story, and the imagined community that underpins it, was consolidated through collective endeavours, most notably the formation of the largest empire in European history and a succession of wars (the most salient of which against the French, the Germans, and more recently 'Islamic terrorists'), all of which offered suitable Others in relation to which the British self was solidified. The principal argument of the Parekh Report – one which I will elaborate with reference to a number of ancillary

⁵⁷ The Commission was established by the Runnymede Trust, "an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society" (www.runnymedetrust.org), and counted with a number of academic luminaries known for their research on race and ethnicity in Britain (including Stuart Hall, Tariq Modood, Muhammad Anwar, Sally Tomlinson and Binkhu Parekh himself) as well as a variety of other contributors including high profile journalists, civil servants, community workers and members of various other stakeholder groups.

sources – is that this ‘national story’ has been reticent to accommodate growing cultural pluralism since the end of WWII. Indeed, the report argues that the national story is informed by the discursive construction of cohesive, ethno-racially marked communities of Others that are denied entry to the imagined community that forms the basis for British identity. In short, “the national story excludes them, or relegates them to subservient and marginal walk-on roles” (Parekh, 2000, p. 5).

As Robins (2001) reminds us, the coherence of all national stories is necessarily provisional and ephemeral:

The nation can never actually exist in the form of its ideal image of itself. It is always bound to be compromised by disorderly realities. Thus, the imagined unity of the nation has always been under threat – or has always been imagined under threat – from a real world characterized by its multiplicity and complexity. The imagined unity of the nation has always struggled to cope with actual diversity and difference. In recent years, however, through the accelerating logic of globalization, national communities have felt themselves to be more and more under siege; and they have found it increasingly difficult to defend the integrity and coherence – the always imagined integrity and coherence, let us note – that is at the heart of their narcissistic self-imagination. (p. 486)

Indeed, the historical deconstruction undertaken by the Parekh Report and other writings reveal the British national story to be little more than a powerful fiction based on the selective reading of a complex history that is characterized by the differences, exchanges, conflicts and unequal relationships between multiple

collectivities.⁵⁸ Britishness, it claims, has always been a highly fractured, contested and ultimately plural category of identification, whose heterogeneity has been hard to contain by the English elites who dominate the political and economic landscape of the British Isles (see also Kumar, 2001; S. Hall, 2000). Since the Second World War, the already dubious integrity of the national story has been further destabilized by a series of emergent contexts and trends. As identified in the Parkeh Report, these include: globalization and the concomitant cross-border flows of capital and culture; the steady decline of Britain as a military, political and economic power; the rise of the European Union; the formal end of Empire; the devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; the rapid social pluralization of British society; and finally, and most importantly for our purposes, post-war migration and the establishment of an ethno-racially plural population. According to the Parekh Report, these interweaving contexts place Britain and its national story at a historical cross-roads where the option of pursuing an insular and exclusionary conception of Britishness coexists with the option of developing a more inclusive and cosmopolitan national community at ease with its internal difference (see Parekh 2000, p. 15).

It is important to recognize that London and port cities like Liverpool and Bristol were home to sizeable, established communities of immigrant origin since at least

⁵⁸ Most notably between Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, Norman, English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, and continental European as well as smaller, more regionally defined cultural groups and centuries old communities of migrants from around the world. It is also important to foreground the linguistic (i.e. Gaelic) and religious (i.e. Catholic) differences that have been a consistent thorn in the British national story.

the colonial period. However, the post-colonial migration of people from the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent caused a rapid increase in the size and public profile of ethnic and racial groups in Britain (Julios, 2008; Fisher, Lahiri and Thandi, 2007; Ali, Kalra and Sayyid, 2006).⁵⁹ The question now becomes, has the national story responded to this change? On one hand, it has led to fundamental questions being asked of British identity at the dawn of the new millennium. Much of the academic literature cited in this section of the thesis is evidence of this. On the other hand, many would argue, it has caused a widespread retreat into an essentialized vision of Britishness (Dawson, 2007; Gilroy, 2005a, 2002, 1993; K.

⁵⁹ This movement of people from the Caribbean and the South Asian subcontinent to Britain was underpinned by a colonial history of flows and counter flows, a network of exchange, if you will, between the areas in question (Brah, 2006; Thandi, 2007). However, a more narrowly defined set of push and pull factors present during the post-war years is seen by many analysts as the driving force behind the arrival of Afro-Caribbeans and South Asians in Britain (Brah, 2006; Thandi, 2007). On one hand, migration was spurred by centuries of colonial exploitation in the Caribbean and South Asia that resulted in underdeveloped economies that were unable to productively mobilize a rapidly growing supply of labour (and in so doing make the shift to a modern industrial economy) (Dawson, 2007; Pilkington, 2003). On the other hand, post-war reconstruction efforts in Britain combined with a strong industrial economy in the United Kingdom created a large demand for both low wage migrant labour and, to a lesser extent, for skilled migrant labour such as doctors and engineers. Chain migration fed this migrant flow as did the eventual arrival of dependants, once earlier migrants had become sufficiently established (Thandi, 2007). Public policy at the time posed few barriers to immigration. Indeed, the Nationality Act of 1948, passed partly in response to Indian independence in 1947, re-affirmed the citizenship rights of all subjects of the British Empire and extended these rights to independent commonwealth countries including India and Pakistan (Julios, 2008). In theory, at least, migrants from across the empire had the right to live in the United Kingdom under the same terms as people born there. While policy changes progressively curtailed immigration from the Caribbean and South Asia in the 1960s and virtually ended it in the 1970s (a point to which I shall return below), the post-war labour migrations can be seen as the foundation of ethno-racial plurality in Britain (Julios, 2008).

Hall, 2002; Story & Childs, 2002; S. Hall, 2000).⁶⁰ Indeed, S. Hall (2000) argues that in the face of growing ethno-racial pluralism, the national story is based on the assumption that a unified and homogeneous culture existed until the arrival of post-war migrants. Gilroy (2005a) makes this point eloquently in an analysis of the salient position occupied by the Second World War in the British national story:

I think there is something neurotic about Britain's continued citation of the anti-Nazi war. Making it a privileged point of entry into national identity and self-understanding reveals a desire to find a way back to the point where the national culture – operating on a more manageable scale of community and social life – was, irrespective of the suffering involved in the conflict, both comprehensible and habitable. That memory of the country at war against foes who are simply, tidily, and uncomplicatedly evil has recently acquired the status of an ethnic myth. It explains not only how the nation remade itself through war and victory but can also be understood as a rejection or deferral of its present problems. That process is driven by the need to get back to the place or moment before the country lost its moral and cultural bearings. Neither the appeal of homogeneity nor the antipathy toward immigrants and strangers who represent the involution of national culture can be separated from that underlying hunger for reorientation. Turning back in this direction is also a turning away from the perceived dangers of pluralism and from the irreversible fact of multiculturalism. (p. 90)

Gilroy and the other scholars cited above are effectively describing a siege mentality emerging in the wake of growing ethnic and racial difference.⁶¹ If it was not already

⁶⁰ Kumar argues that this retreat has been accompanied by the rise of an even more narrowly defined Englishness that effectively inhibits the pluralisation of Britain conceptually if not demographically.

⁶¹ It is in this regard that both S. Hall (1999) and K. Hall (2002) point to a veritable obsession with built 'heritage' in Britain as a marker of rootedness, lineage and continuity, whose material preservation is synonymous with the preservation of an embattled Britishness. Of course, as S. Hall (1999) points out, that which is identified and upheld as 'heritage' is highly selective and revelatory of the

abundantly apparent by the turn of the century, the image of an embattled Britain was brought to the forefront by the response to the Parekh Report in the conservative media (traced in detail by Pilkington, 2003; see also McLaughlin and Neal, 2004), which leapt to the defense of the narrowly defined Britishness that the report seeks to undermine and replace with a more inclusive national imaginary.

The reactionary desire to defend the perceived homogeneity of Britain is perhaps best evidenced in public policy surrounding citizenship and immigration during the latter half of the 20th century. According to research by a number of scholars (Dawson, 2007; Ali, 2006; Pilkington, 2003; K. Hall, 2002), citizenship and immigration policies contributed to the discursive construction of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian migrants as undesirable Others, while simultaneously seeking to limit their entry into Britain. Going further, K. Hall (2002) argues that these policies (combined with others in the domain of education for instance) “exert a taxonomical control over difference,” demarcating post-war migrants as ethno-racially marked minorities and in so doing “marginalize and exclude them from fully belonging in mainstream society” (p. 13). Concretely speaking, a number of scholars refer to the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962 and 1968, the Immigrants Act of 1971 and the Nationality Act of 1981 as key moments in a policy shift that progressively

exclusionary nationalist narrative it is mobilized in support of. If heritage is an important ‘tool’ of this discourse, then its main proponents have been a succession of high profile conservative politicians, including Enoch Powell, Margret Thatcher, Norman Tebbit, Michael Portillo, John Major and many others, whose populist rhetoric, disseminated by their supporters in the popular media, has reflected and reproduced the siege mentality by laying blame on migrant communities for many of the growing economic and social ills of Britain (Kumar, 2001).

framed citizenship and immigration in ethno-racial terms. Detailed analysis of these various policy documents and the narratives surrounding their adoption argue that each was motivated by a desire to curb Afro-Caribbean and South Asian immigration, while simultaneously, if implicitly, defining who constituted a fully-fledged member of Britain's imagined community (Julios, 2008; Ali, 2006; Pilkington, 2003; K. Hall, 2002).⁶² K. Hall (2002) extends the substance of this argument to a series of Race Relations Acts passed in 1965, 1968 and 1976 (the latter amended and reinforced in 2000), which were aimed at reducing the discrimination experienced by post-war migrants in Britain and the very public tensions and conflicts that occurred as a result.⁶³ Ostensibly offering a more positive countercurrent to the nationalist rhetoric behind the various citizenship and immigration acts referred to above, K. Hall (2002) nonetheless describes the race

⁶² The most recent Act of parliament relevant to the discussion at hand, the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002*, responds to recent contexts defined by massive growth in asylum applications, post 9/11 anxieties and concerns over the socio-economic and cultural integration of ethno-racial minorities in Britain. It does so by spelling out an ideal vision wherein immigrants must commit themselves to the British 'way of life'. The Act attempts to legislate this by requiring new immigrants to possess a working knowledge of English, pass the 'Life in the UK' test that assesses knowledge of British history, culture, institutions and other aspects of life in Britain, and by taking an Oath or Pledge at a formal citizenship ceremony. While certain aspects of the Act can be seen as promoting an easy transition to life in the UK by ensuring that immigrants have a practical knowledge of day to day governance in Britain, other aspects can be said to reflect an urge to reaffirm and reinforce the boundaries of the British nation into which migrants are conditionally (but never completely) admitted. It should be noted that the more recent *Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act of 2006* clarified a number of legal positions pertaining to citizenship and immigration without changing the overall vision proposed in the 2002 Act. See Wetherell (2008) for a cogent discussion on policy pertaining to cultural pluralism during the Blair era.

⁶³ The most famous example being the Notting Hill riots of 1958.

relations acts as contributing to the definition of a population divided on ethno-racial grounds:

The Race Relations Acts are concerned with discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, ethnicity, or national origin. To be protected by this legislation an individual must prove her- or himself to be a member of a 'group,' that regards itself and is regarded by others as a distinct community with a cultural tradition of its own – a tradition, moreover, with a long history. The legislation protects an individual's right to practice cultural difference, but in so doing defines cultural difference in ethnic or racially absolute terms.

Legal discourse constitutes minority statuses in efforts to determine who belongs to a nation and to protect the rights of those who do. These forms of political discourse designate minority status in ethnic reductionist terms that assume a homology between a community and a culture. These essentialist constructs, in contradictory fashion, provide the basis for challenging discrimination while simultaneously defining the boundaries of national belonging in racial terms. (p. 54)

This is admittedly a contentious argument, since it is hard to deny the importance of government policy in taking an active role against both overt and more insidious or systemic forms of racism. Yet, it is also possible to see how it contributes to a broader discursive frame that employs ethno-racial criteria to distinguish between the British nation and its Others. It is this fundamental distinction, I believe, that underpins not only the emergence of an essentialized Britishness in the face of post-war immigration, but also the way in which Afro-Caribbean and South Asian immigrants are discursively constructed as minority groups in contemporary Britain.

It has been widely argued that the cultural logic of Empire, and its post-imperial legacy, has also played a central role in the way post-war migrants have been framed within the British national story. Following Said (1994, 1978), British

Imperialism was characterized by a process of relational identity construction in which ethnic and racial criteria became the basis for distinguishing, in fundamental terms, between the colonizing Self and the colonized Other. In effect, over a lengthy history of colonial encounter and cross-cultural exchange, British identity was heavily shaped by its perceived difference from – and innate superiority over – the African, Asian and American cultures under British rule (Dawson, 2007; Ali, Kalra & Sayyid, 2006; Gilroy, 2005a; S. Hall, 2000). The work of representation in a variety of popular media played a key role in this process, especially with respect to relational identity construction among everyday members of the British public during the colonial period (C. Hall, 2001). In addition, the perception of rooted and unalterable ethnic and racial difference also served the more practical purpose of naturalizing and legitimating the exploitation and violence that characterized the imperial project.

It has been widely argued that the cultural logic of empire based on notions of essential ethnic and racial difference has remained influential long after formal decolonization. Gilroy argues that in a post-imperial period marked by the migrations of former colonial subjects “many people in Britain have come to need ‘race’ and perhaps welcome its certainties as one sure way to keep their bearing in a world they experience as increasingly confusing” (Gilroy, 2005a, p. 106). For Gilroy and other scholars (such as Dawson, 2007), race and the fundamental cultural difference it is meant to encode, has remained an important organizing concept for British identity not only despite, but because of a rapidly pluralizing

society. Indeed, as the Parekh Report (2000) argues, in what turned out to be a very contentious paragraph, conceptions of essential difference stemming from the imperial context inform the condition of post-war migrants and their ethno-racially marked children in Britain today:

Britishness, as much as Englishness, has systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations. Whiteness nowhere features as an explicit condition of being British, but it is widely understood that [it] is racially coded. 'There ain't no Black in the Union Jack,' it has been said. Race is deeply entwined with political culture and with the idea of nation, and underpinned by a distinctively British kind of reticence – to take race and racism seriously, or even to talk about them at all, is bad form, something not done in polite company. This disavowal, combined with 'an iron-jawed disinclination to recognize equal human worth and dignity of people who are not White', had proved a lethal combination. Unless these deep-rooted antagonisms to racial and cultural difference can be defeated in practice, as well as symbolically written out of the national story, the idea of a multicultural post-nation remains an empty promise. (p. 38)

Supporting this claim, a number of recent studies published since the Parkeh Report describe widespread racial discrimination – in some cases overt, but most often systemic – in multiple domains of public life in Britain, including the labour market, the judiciary, the National Health Service, the educational system, the media, urban politics, immigration and asylum policy, housing markets, and public space (Kundani, 2004; Solomos, 2003; Mason, 2003; Pilkington, 2003; see also Wetherell 2008). These inequalities, argues the Parekh Report (2000), "have been fuelled by a fixed conception of national identity and culture" (p. 36).

Apart from underpinning racial discrimination in contemporary British society, the cultural legacy of empire can also be felt in the way communities of post-war migrant origin are imagined in contemporary Britain. Once again, according to the Parekh Report:

One customary approach which co-exists with the dominant version of the national story outlined above, is to see them as bounded, homogeneous groupings, each fixedly attached to its ethnicity and traditions. The 'majority' by the same token, is imagined to be fixed, unified, settled. This attitude underlies most public policy – for example, school curricula, many aspects of the criminal justice system and the health service, official policy on asylum and immigration and the way the government addresses social exclusion. (p. 26)

This is an argument developed at length by Baumann (1996) in a seminal book of enduring relevance. Baumann identifies what he calls a “dominant discourse” surrounding the representation of ethno-racial groups in British society. The cornerstones of this dominant discourse are what he sees as the problematic deployment of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘community’. In Baumann’s view, when used in relation to ethno-racially defined groups, ‘culture’ is reified such that it implies the existence of fixed and inevitable boundaries that circumscribe one group from another. Similarly, use of the term ‘community’, as in the ‘Indian community in London’ implies the existence of a ‘special collective’ that shares a common culture in reified form. In fact, the unproblematic deployment of the two terms is mutually reinforcing, since each naturalizes the existence of the other. Indeed, as Alexander, Edwards and Temple (2000) write, “minorities [in contemporary Britain] are portrayed as the manifestations of a pre-modern version of ‘community’, marked by

a supposed internal homogeneity of (different) cultures, values and languages” (p. 797).

The result is a vision of British society in which ethno-racially based cultural communities are sealed off from each other due to deeply rooted differences (Sayyid, 2006; Mason, 2003; Gilroy, 2000; K. Hall, 2002; Story & Childs, 2002). In Baumann's (1996) analysis:

Such an economical, indeed hermetically closed, discourse is well placed when it comes to competing for communicative monopoly. In Britain, as perhaps elsewhere, its protagonists command communicative resources that guarantee it unrivalled access to the general public. Its chief protagonists are, on one side, politicians claiming to represent the interests of ‘communities’; and on the other, politicians claiming to speak for some wider ‘national’ interest, or indeed ‘the majority’. Multiplication of their dialogue is the business of the popular media, which besides television include national and community press, national and community radio stations, and, sometimes as importantly, national or community artists, authors, comedians, musicians, and poets. In Britain, the dominant discourse is reflected by virtually all voices that shape public opinion. (p. 23)

He goes on to discuss how politicians and groups with right wing, liberal and left wing agendas and ideologies alike employ this discourse, with different emphasis and for different ends. Moreover, it is mobilized, and in the process validated, by members of ethno-racially defined groups for the purposes of political struggles in which it is advantageous to present the image of a well defined, unified cultural consistency. Indeed, the dominant discourse can be seen as perpetuating itself by fostering ‘cultural politics’ of this kind. Ultimately, for Baumann (1996), “the

discourse about ethnic minorities as communities defined by a reified culture, bears all the hallmarks of dominance: it is conceptually simple, enjoys a communicative monopoly, offers enormous flexibility of application, encompasses great ideological plasticity, and is serviceable for established institutional purposes” (p. 30).

New identities for a new national story

In the estimation of the Parekh Report, the imagined separation of British society into discrete ethno-racially defined cultural communities must be urgently replaced, if the inequalities referred to above are to be eliminated. The report proposes a fundamental rethinking of the national story and identity in order to capture how cultural communities in contemporary Britain are open and porous formations that are internally heterogeneous and constantly adapting and diversifying, interacting and overlapping. They are, in other words, inexorably bound to each other through ongoing cultural exchange in a shared space, which all play a role in defining and redefining, both materially and imaginatively (Parekh, 2000). As Alexander, Edwards and Temple (2000) suggest, the notion of a “minority ethnic ‘community’, like other forms of ‘community’ is...perhaps best understood as a network of alliances – ‘ties between people’ – which may be situational and temporary in form and may bear only tangential reference to the institutional dimensions of ‘community’ (p. 798).

Baumann (1996) provides a powerful illustration of the fluid boundaries between cultural communities in his ethnography of London's multi-ethnic neighbourhood of Southall. His core argument is that while Southhallians do contribute to the reification of bounded cultural communities in certain contexts, they also dissolve the equation between culture and community by re-defining the basis of each during their everyday lives. Unsurprisingly, Baumann finds that this is most evident among second-generation youth, whose social relationships and practices contribute to the making and remaking of culture and community beyond narrowly defined ethnic, racial, or religious boundaries. Indeed, Baumann's study suggests that the socio-spatial lives of second-generation youth are effectively breaking down the putative boundaries that have long informed the British national story. In an effort to taper this discussion more closely in line with my analysis of *Tourism* and *Londonstani*, I would like to explore this proposition further, specifically in relation to British-born children of South Asian parentage.

Alexander (2006) argues that the sociological imagination in Britain – both popular and academic – has long conceptualized British youth of South Asian origin as being trapped in tension between the cultural norms and values of their parental culture and those of Anglo-British society. They are portrayed as being caught in an inevitable identity conflict as they try to reconcile two opposing world views that can be neatly summed up according to a series of Orientalist binaries: tradition versus modernity, community versus the individual, duty versus freedom, and so forth (Alexander 2006). While this perspective may have lost currency in academic

circles in recent years, Alexander argues that it has seen new life breathed into it in public circles by a widespread moral panic that increasingly frames British-Asian male youth as disaffected, deviant and alienated individuals prone to violence and radicalism as a result of their conflicted identities. Young women, on their part are framed as the object of culturally rooted patriarchal control and oppression rather than empowered agents. For Brah (2007, 2006), the 'between two cultures' thesis is fundamentally flawed on a number of fronts. First, it denies agency to second generations by portraying them as inevitably disoriented and confused individuals who have broken irrevocably from the cultural fields of their parents. Second, it relies on the notion of unitary South-Asian cultures (i.e. an Indian culture or Punjabi culture or Sikh culture) and a singular British culture that oppose each other diametrically when, in fact, these categories are plural and mutable. Third, the focus on conflict overshadows the possibility of cultural exchange, fusion and formation in multicultural contexts. As a result of academic critiques such as these and the mainstreaming of cultural forms associated with second-generation South Asians, an alternative sociological imagination around British youth of South Asian origin has developed, one that, in academic terms, revolves around the production of 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' (Alexander, 2006).

This alternative sociological imagination is captured in the increasing use of the term 'Brasian'⁶⁴ as a descriptor for second-generation South Asians in Britain (see

⁶⁴ Although this seems to be the term preferred in scholarly circles, the term 'Desi', which effectively describes the same type of identity has gained currency in popular circles in Britain.

Wetherell, 2008; Ali, Kalra & Sayyid, 2006; Harris, 2006). To recall, the term describes the formation of identities based on the selective incorporation and fusion of British and South Asian practices, attitudes and values, as well as other cultural influences found locally or circulated globally through flows of commoditized popular culture. According to Harris (2006), it,

is certainly not intended to be just another homogenizing term, nor does it imply assimilation. Instead it captures the rich and elaborate interwoven enactment of ethnicities in the interstitial textures of everyday life. It is a formulation embracing openness, variability and unpredictability. (p. 13)

In academic scholarship, Brasian identities are associated with both everyday life and mainstream forms of cultural production. One ethnographic study, for instance, argues that Brasian identities are reflected in the vernacular language of second-generation youth, which reveals “a rich polyphony of London English, community languages such as Gujarati and Punjabi, as well as Jamaican and African-American English expression” (Harris, 2006, p. 3). Others point to the articulation of Brasian identities in the rise of popular culture that reflects British, South Asian and indeed other cultural influences found in urban Britain (see Sharma and Sharma 1996; and part III of Ali, Kalra and Sayyid, 2006).⁶⁵ This cultural output includes a variety of urban music genres, cinema, television, literature and fashion, which are held both

⁶⁵ This focus recalls S. Hall’s (1991) seminal arguments that we should think of “identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 210).

to articulate Brasian identities and actualize their political currency by circulating them as a basis for collective belonging and social inclusion in urban Britain.⁶⁶

The political currency attributed to Brasian identities is associated with their potential to undermine the binary established between British and South Asian identities through the production of culture that bridges the two. In effect, they challenge the normative categorizations and assumptions of essential difference based on ethnicity and race that have long informed the national story and policed the boundaries of Britishness. In doing so, they not only support demands for an alternative national imaginary, but also offer a basis upon which this may take shape in more fluid and inclusive terms. As Sayyid (2006) argues, Brasian identities constitute nothing less than a post-colonial reconfiguration of what it means to be British:

Brasian signifies the impossibility of a hyphenated identity. In the context of the postcolonial, ethnically marked identities cannot be mere superficial additions to the national identity, which remains basically the same. Brasian demonstrates that transformations occur across the national majority/ethnic minority divide, and disrupts that balance of power in which the national majority holds all the cards since the boundaries that constituted that national majority are themselves subject to the process of social and cultural transformations. (p. 7)

⁶⁶ This paragraph does not deny the continuity of a strong association with 'old' or 'traditional' identities that take the form of pride in ones origins, identification with certain group labels (especially religion) and sometimes a political assertiveness (Modood, 2001). Nor does it unproblematically declare the emergence of a pan-Asian culture in Britain that reaches across caste, national, linguistic and religious divides found in South Asia. Rather, following Modood (2001), it accepts that 'old' and 'new' identities need not be "pitted against each other in either or fashion" (p. 76). The two co-exist in everyday life, although one may be emphasized over the other depending on the context or circumstance in which a person finds themselves (see Harris, 2006).

For Wetherell (2008), the emergence of Brasian, and indeed other hybrid identities, is increasingly at odds with long-standing assumptions concerning ethnic and racial difference that continue to inform public discourse in Britain. She argues that while the government's integrationist rhetoric in the wake of the 7/7 London bombings continues to envision a society composed of discrete, bounded and essentialized ethno-racial communities, academic studies indicate that "narrow definitions of identity in terms of race, singular ethnic culture, and one overarching national identity [are] increasingly qualified by all the other multiple possibilities for belonging" (Wetherell 2008, p. 306). For her, Brasian identities are precisely the type of new forms of belonging that render the government discourse untenable.

It has been argued that London, in particular, is a key site for the formation of identities – Brasian and otherwise – that disrupt the dominant national story. "From London," writes Robins (2001) "I think, it is possible to think differently – more productively – about cultural interactions in contemporary Britain" (p. 473-4; see also McLeod, 2004). He goes on to propose that:

London can actually serve as a cognitive model for all of us – and that, in terms of thinking cultures now it might be that we all have need of London. [...] I am not saying that London exists at the present time as some kind of ideal cultural space – an achieved cosmopolitan order. I am all too aware of the coexistence, for example of both multicultures and multiracisms – of 'the contradictions between the vibrancy of hybridisation and the pervasiveness of racism' (Pheonix, 1998, p. 87). What I am wanting to propose is that London might serve as a tool for thinking in different ways about questions of cultural complexity, confrontation, interaction, negotiation, and so on. [...] I would argue that now in the context of the new order of cultural complexity being brought about

by processes of globalization, London provides a crucial intellectual framework for British people to rethink and redescribe their relation to culture and identity. (Robins, 2001, p. 488)

For Robins, the city, as a space of provisional experiences, interactions and negotiations, is a privileged site for considering questions of identity and identification at the more abstracted national scale.⁶⁷ In this conception, “London can be considered a profoundly disruptive location, incubating new social relations and cultural forms, which conflict with the advocacy of a national culture or the pursuit of cultural nationalism” (McLeod, 2004, p. 18).

Having made this final point, it is time to return to the novels. In the final section of this chapter I would like to consider how their representation of Brasian identities as a socio-spatial basis for urban citizenship in London contributes to the discussions of British cultural nationalism discussed above. More specifically, how does the ambiguous or equivocal aspect of this representation upon which my analysis is focused shape or reshape our assessment of the politics of Brasian identities? In pursuing this line of discussion, I maintain that the content of the novels becomes meaningful partly in relation to surrounding discourses, which are themselves subject to reexamination through a reading of the novels.

⁶⁷ This argument dovetails neatly with my earlier discussion (in Section One of the thesis) on the relationship between questions of urban citizenship and those of national citizenship.

Equivocal interventions

In my reading of *Tourism* and *Londonstani* I emphasized the spatial production of Brasian identities, the ways in which they are grounded and negotiated in everyday urban spaces. Adopting a spatial perspective allowed me to highlight the complexity and ambiguity of Brasian identities as a basis for informal urban citizenship in London, at least within the narrative economy of the novels. Stemming from this analysis it can be said that a reading of *Tourism* and *Londonstani* encourages a more tempered perspective on the emancipatory or progressive cultural politics associated with the production of Brasian identities. It does so by simultaneously registering the (widely acknowledged) potential and (perhaps overlooked) limitations of Brasian identities with respect to social inclusion in the multicultural city. This, in turn, opens the door to a more nuanced appraisal of how the representation of Brasian and other urban identities engages the discourses on diversity discussed earlier in this chapter. Indeed, I would argue that the representation of Brasian identities in these novels disrupts any straightforward conceptions of the city as a progenitor and incubator of new identities – Brasian or otherwise – that both challenge and re-configure a problematic national imaginary of ethnic and racial pluralism.

In one regard, the spatial production and performance of Brasian identities in both *Tourism* and *Londonstani* not only acts as a basis for informal urban citizenship among the characters, but can also be seen as reconfiguring the discursive basis of the national story. In *Tourism*, Puppy eschews the ethno-racially based Sikh

identity available to him in Southall for a cosmopolitan inhabitation of central London that is characterized by the constant crossing of putative social and spatial boundaries. In *Londonstani*, the cultivation of a distinct Brasian identity that reflects multiple local and global influences allows Malkani's characters to resist marginalization by the host society, shape the normative social environment of Hounslow, and represent themselves in public space on their own terms. In both cases, the political currency of the identities with respect to urban citizenship stems from the transgression of traditional categories of ethnic and racial membership. By contesting membership in the urban public in these terms, the characters simultaneously undermine a discursive vision of British society based on discrete, bounded and essentialized ethnic and racial communities, relations between which require major acts of translation. In effect, the novels represent social and political agency among second-generation youth in a way that requires a far more flexible and contextual imaginary of cultural pluralism in Britain than many analysts feel currently exists.

At the same time, a spatial reading of the novels suggests that the Brasian identities of the various characters offer only a provisional and incomplete foundation for informal urban citizenship. This limitation extends beyond the immediate context of multicultural London to limit the political currency of the Brasian identities in the novels at the national scale. Despite the ease with which he engages in social relations across socio-spatial borders, Puppy fails in his desire to find a sense of belonging in downtown London and suffers increasingly from displacement and

disassociation within the spaces of his everyday life in the city. His cosmopolitan identity does not translate into a new form of socio-political membership, but rather simply places him outside existing categories of ethnic, racial, class and gendered belonging (amongst others). In *Londonstani*, the political currency of the Desi-Rudeboy identity is equally limited – its scope does not extend beyond the marginal suburb of Hounslow and it relies on the maintenance of a fragile front sustained through incessant consumption. Moreover, it is underscored by perpetual conflict with a series of Others, in opposition to which the Desi-Rudeboys in *Londonstani* define themselves. Indeed, in both *Tourism* and *Londonstani*, the Brasian identities of the main characters are informed by a sense of fundamental difference from Other urban identities that appear in the novels. Consequently, they are almost as unitary and bounded as the normative categories of British and South Asian identity from which they can be seen to depart. In other words, the Brasian identities in the two novels are not based on progressive new affiliations or criteria of commonality that crosscut the urban public, but rather the creation of new, exclusive categories of identity. As a result, they do not ultimately offer a robust challenge to the binary oppositions at the heart of British cultural nationalism. Indeed, in neither case do the Brasian identities represented lead to a sense of belonging to Britain (or even London) as an imagined community, which remains a stark axis of difference for both sets of characters.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ As Jas puts it, “can you imagine a Desi in London getting excited bout the Union Jack? That shit’s just for, like, football hooligans, the royal family and all those dicks who go round singin ‘Rule Britannia’ (p. 216).

Given the above, the two novels also propel the reader to think of informal urban citizenship primarily in adversarial terms. Current definitions of the concept stress that it is the contingent outcome of socio-cultural negotiation and positioning. Yet there is also a sense that to successfully contest urban citizenship results in some form of equality – defined in terms of legitimacy, visibility, influence, etc – vis-à-vis other groups in the city. However, the representations in these novels reposition informal urban citizenship as a concept underscored by notions of fundamental difference and exclusion. Cast in this light, it is hardly a basis for inclusion and membership in a broader collective or public. Thus, my analysis of these novels raises fundamental questions about the very notion of informal urban citizenship and, indeed, citizenship more generally. That is, should citizenship be conceptualized primarily in terms of equality and membership, or as a basis of exclusion for both non-citizens and citizens who lack the power to define the terms of citizenship, informal or otherwise? In a sense, the novels remind us the negotiation of informal urban citizenship by one group can occur at the expense of others achieving the same goals.

It is undeniable that *Tourism* and *Londonstani* form part of an original and irreverent body of recent cultural production emerging from London and other British cities. In his monograph on what he refers to as ‘postcolonial’ literature about London, McLeod (2004) argues that this body of writing has the potential to,

daringly imagine an alternative city in which divisive tensions are effectively resisted, and progressive, transformative kinds of social and cultural relationships are glimpsed. [...] Such projections are

often inspired by the popular cultural energies of everyday life in London...where received models of race, identity and belonging begin to break down. [...] The articulation of utopian visions of London which take seriously the possibilities of diasporic living are frequently bound up with the critical advocacy of youth. This is not, of course, to presume that new versions of London spring into concrete existence immediately when they are voiced, or that the social divisions of the city magically disappear at the moment when they are semiotically challenged in novels, films, songs or poems. I do not wish to pursue an unrealistic culturalist approach to the mystical effectivity of postcolonial London writing, but I would like to suggest that such projective, utopian impulses possess a transformative potential which contributes to and resources the changing shape and experiences of London's 'facticity'. (p. 15-16)

This may certainly be the case in the novels studied by McLeod and it is hard to deny that literature and other forms of popular representation do not encode a progressive politics of 'conviviality' that, as Gilroy (2005b) writes, "makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity" (p. xv). Indeed, the Brasian identities associated with a variety of popular cultural forms may be said to accomplish just that. Without seeking to deny this, it is important not to allow this perspective to over-determine our apprehension of the body of writing in question; we need to remain attentive to what the novels are actually saying.

A spatial reading of *Tourism* and *Londonstani* that attends to the ways in which the Brasian identities of the main characters take shape in everyday spaces, offers a more nuanced and equivocal perspective on the identity politics of Brasian identities in relation to social inclusion at both urban and national scales. At the urban scale, the spatial negotiation of Brasian identities in the novel constitutes only a tenuous and limited basis for informal urban citizenship. At the national scale, these

identities may disrupt the normative categories of identification that inform the national story, but as an alternative they offer an equally rigid conception of identity. It follows that the two novels generate and circulate a representation that effectively encourages the reader to resist dwelling primarily on the transformative and emancipatory currency of Brasian identities. Their content suggests that the production of hybrid identities in the city and their representation in various media does not necessarily offer a facile imaginary of informal citizenship within urban and national contexts of cultural pluralism. Rather, they reinforce the need for a perspective on urban identities and the politics thereof that is grounded in the spaces of everyday life in the city.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on the representation of a city in a novel may well be interesting, but what has become more interesting for geographers is thinking about the role that that representation plays in creating urban identities. From this perspective, questions of what is true and false in a text are irrelevant; instead the focus is on the ability of the text to create reality through the invention and documentation of difference. (Hubbard, 2006, p.75)

The extract above from Phil Hubbard's book 'Cities' goes a long way toward capturing the relevance of analysing the three novels studied, which lies in the way they produce rather than reflect particular intersections between space, identity and citizenship in Toronto and London. In Chapter Two of the thesis, I outlined a body of scholarship in which geographers and sociologists have argued that the spatial negotiation of urban identities can be regarded as a politicized process that shapes informal urban citizenship in multicultural cities around the world. By bringing literature into the fold of this research, it has not been my intention to suggest that novels offer a straightforward reflection of the phenomena that geographers and sociologists have been considering in their own research. In other words, I do not see literature as a means of validating, refining or, for that matter, refuting what academic studies have already argued convincingly, based on other methods of interrogation (c.f. Brosseau, 1995). Rather, my interest in literature lies in its ability to inform an imaginary that contributes to the very constitution of society and space in the multicultural city. Consequently, I have mobilized the concept of informal

urban citizenship in order to consider how the novels studied define and redefine social positioning among second generations in Toronto and London through their representations of identity being negotiated in everyday spaces.

As Côté (2003) suggests, literature, as form of representation, is particularly well suited to contributing to what Hubbard refers to above as the 'creation of reality'. This is because novels, argues Côté, (2003) consist of an ensemble of fictional components that are necessarily embedded in a variety of contexts:

[La littérature] permet une très grande liberté dans ce qu'elle met en scène comme contenu imaginaire (personnages, situations, jeux des significations, métaphores, métonymie, etc.), et ensuite elle table tout aussi bien sur une très grande 'concrétude' dans ses déterminations, c'est-à-dire que tous les éléments imaginaires, qu'elle mobilise sont malgré tout, au travers même du travail de la forme dont ils sont l'objet, très nettement situés sur les plans sociohistorique et symbolique. (p. 502)

In this passage, Côté is essentially alluding to the relationship between the fictional ensemble that comprises a novel and the extra-textual referents and contexts to which it relates (or is related during the act of interpretation). As suggested in Chapter Two, this relationship can be understood in relation to Bakhtin's notion that language (and literary language in particular) is inherently dialogical. That is to say, the meaning of any utterance is the outcome of the dialogue it stimulates with its audience, contexts of production and reception, and any number of utterances by which it was preceded (Abrams 2005; Holquist, 1990). An inherently generative phenomenon (Pearce, 2006), this dialogical process of signification has the capacity

to shape and reshape how any number of intersections between space and time are understood and imagined.

In relation to the specific novels with which I have worked, my goal has been to consider how their textual content offers a focal point for new and ongoing discussions about the spatial politics of identity and informal urban citizenship in the multicultural city. Each of the novels analysed offers perspectives on how second generations negotiate and reconfigure identity in the multicultural city through spatial processes of subject formation, the outcomes and implications of which are central themes of the three novels. Indeed, identity is not represented primarily as a matter of cultural belonging in these novels, but rather a unit of social difference, agency and positioning defined and redefined in and through urban space. My argument has been that the representation of spatially embedded and mediated identities, actions and interactions among the main protagonists in the novels generates and circulates a powerful dramatization of second generations in Toronto and London. This dramatization offers a particular set of parameters in relation to which the readership interprets, apprehends, conceptualizes – ‘makes sense of’ – the socio-spatial lives and politics associated with second generations.

Equally important, from my perspective, are the ways in which the novels enter into an inter-textual dialogue (mediated by the reader or analyst) with ongoing debates about the politics of identity and difference in Canada and the UK. Indeed, as I tried to show in Chapters Four and Seven, the content of the various novels takes on

added meaning and relevance when understood in relation to these ancillary narratives. My approach has been to consider how *What We All Long For*, *Tourism* and *Londonstani* constitute 'interventions' that, on one hand, reflect and reinforce ongoing debates (or aspects thereof), while, on the other hand, add their own inflections and stresses that can shape the future course of thought (and therefore action) on the themes and questions at hand. I would argue that pursuing a spatial reading of the novels has been essential to capturing their relevance and originality in this regard. As I tried to show, in each case it is precisely the representation of identity being negotiated through everyday urban spaces that provides the basis for the interventions highlighted. In effect, the emplaced optic privileged by these novels is what positions them to variously reproduce and challenge important dimensions of current discussions on the politics of cultural pluralism.

As I explicitly acknowledge earlier in the thesis, my approach to representation is based on the post-structural conception that the meaning of subjects and objects is constituted in part through textual processes of signification. From this perspective, "[p]eu importe que le monde soit conçu comme réel ou imaginé; la production de sens qui en découle est du même ordre" (Westphal, 2007, p. 151).⁶⁹ As a result, within the paradigm offered by post-structuralism, it is reductionist to treat representation and reality as fundamentally separate realms that reciprocally inform each other in clearly identifiable ways. The imbrications between the two are far too

⁶⁹ Elsewhere in the same volume on what he refers to as *Géocritique*, Westphal (2007) considers that "la littérature – comme tout art mimétique – correspond toujours à la représentation d'un réel infiniment plastique dont la 'réalité' apparente ne constitue qu'une posture parmi d'autres" (p. 149-50).

complex and complete for this to be the case. Having made this point, I nonetheless find myself with the urge to conclude the thesis by pointing, in more concrete terms, to the influential role of these particular novels in shaping conceptions and perspectives on social and spatial life in the multicultural city, particularly in relation to second generations. More specifically, I wish to discuss how their reception in the popular media (newspapers, magazines) defines a 'horizon of reception' that positions them as an important source for understanding and engaging with the politics of identity and belonging in contemporary Toronto and London. In other words, I intend to see out the thesis by considering the circulation of the novels in the public sphere.⁷⁰

All three novels received wide-spread media attention surrounding their release, both at home and abroad. To begin with, a number of media reviews suggest that the novels offer readers an accurate reflection or illustration of social life in Toronto and London respectively. For instance, it is suggested that Brand "has developed a keen and incisive rendering of the everyday ordinariness of multicultural and multi-racial Toronto" (Walcott, 2005, p. D6). Dhariwal (2006), on his part, "offers a peek into modern Britain and the generation of immigrant children it's raised", while Malkani's "overall portrait of a hybridity of races, religions, ethnicities and globalized reference points is a welcome reflection of the everyday life of London's youth"

⁷⁰ To be abundantly clear, it is not my intention to introduce an entirely new dimension to the thesis at this late stage by trying to offer a systematic analysis of how these novels have been received and the implications this might have. Furthermore, it is not my objective to compare or contrast my reading of the novels with the (far less detailed) readings done by media reviewers. Rather, my goal is to leave the reader with a sense of the social role and influence of the novels studied.

(Younge, 2006, p. 36). This common refrain is reinforced by reviews that emphasize the degree to which the content of the novels is based on the author's first-hand observations and experiences. In relation to *What We All Long For*, several reviews publish snippets of interviews that quote Brand as saying that she set out to produce a novel that captures Toronto as she knows it (i.e. "I'd be looking through the window and I'd think this is like the frame of the book, the frame of reality [Walker, 2005, p. E04]").⁷¹ To the same effect, a number of reviews convey the idea that *Tourism* is an autobiographical novel based on Dhaliwal's experiences as the son of working-class Punjabi immigrants (see for instance: Williams, 2006; Laing, 2006). Finally, with regard to *Londonstani*, much is made of the fact that Malkani was not only raised in the area of Hounslow, but also that he wrote a thesis on Rudeboy culture as part of an undergraduate degree at Cambridge University ("He spent months hanging with the Hounslow homeboys, jotting down their thoughts and folkways" [Morrison, 2006, p. 66]). Therefore, in this case, the novel's representations are upheld as the product not only of experience, but also scholarly analysis. In relation to all three novels, the sum effect of the reception under consideration is, I would argue, to naturalize their textual content as a rendition of social conditions beyond the novels themselves. In this way, the novels are circulated as a privileged and unparalleled source for gaining insight into social

⁷¹ In the same interview, Brand goes as far as to suggest that she wrote the novel as a sort of literary guidebook to Toronto: "'I learned about cities like Paris or New York, from reading about them,' she says. 'So when I went to New York, I knew where I was. I thought that this city was worth knowing that way,' she says" (Walker, 2005, p. E04).

identity and citizenship among second-generation youth, as well as broader manifestations of society and culture in the multicultural city.

Although the notion that the novels provide a mimetic representation of society and social space is a dominant theme in media reception, many reviews also propose that the novels offer the reader more than just a reflection of something they could otherwise go and see for themselves. These reviews suggest that the novels convey original perspectives and insights that challenge the reader, forcing him or her to think differently about the referents of the novel. For example, one review proposes that “*What We All Long For* is a novel of the historical present that reflects back to us the intimacies of urban life. In the reflection, Brand makes us see ourselves differently and anew (Walcott, 2005, p. D6).” Another reviewer writes that Brand’s perspective is “modifying social geography and civic priorities (Nurse, 2005, p. WP8).” This is not least because the novel is said to be the first to “capture a generation born and bred into [Toronto’s] masala of cultures, creeds and nationalities (Walker 2005, p. E04).” Yet another reviewer is of the opinion that:

Like Toronto – the real and the mythologized – *What We All Long For* is structured on a rather huge arc. There is no single way to traverse that expanse. Whichever route the reader chooses is fine and is sure to take them to spaces not imagined. (Kong, 2005, p. 36)

Here then, the novel is ascribed transformative potential, the capacity to shape and reshape how the public conceives the socio-spatial contexts of Toronto.

A similar case can be made for the London novels. It has been proposed that in *Tourism*, Dhaliwal steers away from “a reductionist debate about [cultural] authenticity” by “deftly avoid[ing] a caught-between-two-cultures orthodoxy that is prevalent in depictions of Asian youth” (Saha, 2007). Indeed, it is argued elsewhere that Dhaliwal exposes readers to a perspective that is different from established ones:

Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal set himself a very tricky task when he sat down to write his debut novel, *Tourism*. He wanted to talk about race in contemporary London. But, unlike Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, he did not want to come at the topic from the point of view of a particular ethnic and geographic community. Nor did he wish to use the light-hearted, middle-brow comic approach of popular comedy series such as *Goodness Gracious Me* or *The Kumars at No. 42*. And he actively turned away from the well meaning, socially conscious, liberal discourse employed by Asian journalists and commentators writing newspaper op-ed columns. (Sandhu, 2008, p. 79-80)

Instead, he “uses his own unimpeachable minority ethnicity” (Laing, 2006, p. 27) to engage in a controversial and politically incorrect depiction of second-generation experiences in the multicultural city. Malkani, too, is said to offer a “controversial and jarring look at the way race and identity politics operate in contemporary urban space” (Lee, 2006, p. D3), one characterized by “the deeper meaning it imparts to easy catchwords such as ‘assimilation’ and ‘multiculturalism’” (Hong, 2006, p. 14):

In the end, Malkani offers few easy answers to the identity issues that plague his characters. Instead his provocative and skilfully wrought conclusion poses a final, intriguing question of the future of race in London society. In its frank interrogation of racial categories and its adept play with language, *Londonstani* is a compelling debut that demands a response from its readers. (Lee, 2006, p. D3)

The idea that the content of the novel 'demands a response' is especially significant here, since it invites the reader to form opinions and viewpoints by actively engaging with the novel. According to a number of reviews, this is significant insofar as the novel contributes to how ethnic and race relations in London take shape in the aftermath of the July 7th, 2007 bombings and the anxieties over 'home grown' terrorism that ensued (see for instance: Lawless, 2006; Omaar, 2006; Younge, 2006).

This is by no means a comprehensive assessment of how the novels have been received in the popular media and the way in which they have circulated in the public domain as a result. Indeed, as a direction of future research, there is certainly far more room to effect a more comprehensive analysis of reception and circulation. This is especially so, given that, according to Sharp (2000), geographers working with literature have placed far more emphasis on textual analysis rather than on reception, leaving the latter rather under studied (but see Le Bel and Tavares, 2008; Brosseau, 2008). In particular, it would be productive (and largely unprecedented in geographical studies of literature) to study more thoroughly how reception and circulation in the public domain contributes to shaping the social and geographical imaginaries emerging from the novels. More specifically, this would involve considering how the many reviews of the novels and media articles in which they are referred to act as parallel texts, encouraging particular interpretive pathways and thematic emphases over others. A future study of this nature would further Hones' (2008) recent call for geographers to

conceptualize literary meaning as emerging from an interpretive event that is not limited to a narrow interaction between text and reader.

Having said this, based on the brief assessment undertaken here, it becomes evident that media reception of the novels positions them as an important source from which readers can draw both knowledge and new insights on social relations in the multicultural city, especially those involving the second generations of ethno-racial minorities. Given this role, it becomes important to analyse the particular representations being generated by the novels as well as how these are linked to broader discussions about the politics of cultural pluralism. While it is obviously impossible to predict how individual readers will respond to the novels and what personal ideas they will develop as a result, it is possible to analyse the influential perspectives, images and imaginings the novels circulate and to discuss the political currency thereof. This is precisely what I have tried to do, using informal urban citizenship as the concept that allowed me to draw out the meanings and politics that can be associated with the spatial actions and interactions of the second-generation characters in the novels. In the process, I also hope to have shown both how the concept can be usefully harnessed in geographical studies on the spatial politics of literary representation and how literary analysis can add a new dimension to important work on the spatial politics of informal urban citizenship in the multicultural city.

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