

“Struggle Work”: Global and Urban Citizenship in Dionne Brand’s What We All Long For

Kit Dobson

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Article abstract

Dionne Brand’s 2005 novel *What We All Long For* represents a generational shift in the politics of being in Canadian space. In it, young, poor, and racialized characters navigate their lives and loves within the urban space of the Greater Toronto Area. Instead of pledging allegiance to the nation-state or longing for a lost home, drifting between or beyond such positions makes possible a new and liberating politics. Brand pursues a rhizomatic form of political resistance in her writing, in which one point can connect to any other to form communities. Old notions of grounded selfhood and belonging are necessarily disrupted in order to uncover a site for being that is open, neither nostalgic nor caught within the politics of inclusion/exclusion or an inside/outside dichotomy. Brand’s deterritorializing project is importantly focused upon urban modes of being that constantly elude the dominant. The novel demonstrates this point in focusing upon protagonists who work actively to construct a new Toronto from below, but whose relatives and friends are caught within a racist system that seeks to limit how their bodies and beings might function.

“Struggle Work”: Global and Urban Citizenship in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*

KIT DOBSON

Our challenge within oppositional movements is to invent home in different spaces that cross geography. We cannot afford to let the international be one-sidedly pernicious.

— M. Jacqui Alexander, “Not Just (Any) *Body*
Can Be a Citizen” (22)

Within the context of our now corporate-run states, the idea of a homogeneous culture in Canada today seems to me not only a dead end (at its most innocent interpretation) but also a hegemonic strategy of capital to produce a ‘pure’ identity to be filled up with commodities and pumped up to defend economic threats by other corporate-run states.

— Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone* (144–45)

DIONNE BRAND’S 2005 NOVEL *What We All Long For* represents a generational shift in the politics of being in Canadian space. In it, young, poor, and racialized characters navigate their lives and loves within the urban space of the Greater Toronto Area, from College Street to the suburb of Richmond Hill. The daily reality of being non-white within Canada gives them strong anti-national political consciousnesses. Their parents, conversely, try to belong to a nation-state that refuses to recognize them because of their ancestry, and are paralyzed, striving for an impossible acceptance alongside a nostalgia for a lost past. The younger generation, however, feels little belonging to either the Canadian nation or to their ancestral homes; for them, finding community is a specifically urban project, and they seek to fracture notions of belonging through a focus on the component parts of that very word: being and longing.¹ Instead of simple notions of belonging, which Brand eschews, her characters engage in the mixed

forms of “struggle work” that Brand has recently discussed in an interview with Pauline Butling (70). The protagonists of the novel, recognizing the city’s incomplete nature, see it as a battleground, as a space for political action and for the creation of a viable sense of self — a space for building culture from below. In this paper, I argue that *What We All Long For* strives to represent some of the ways in which communities are being articulated within what Saskia Sassen calls the global city. My goal here is to show how Dionne Brand’s protagonists — Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku — begin to think themselves into being within contemporary Toronto and the world. I will examine the ways in which their self-imaginings contrast with those of their parents, and how these protagonists suggest some of the incomplete but potentially radical politics of forming communities from below today.

This discussion of *What We All Long For* furthers critical analyses of Brand’s writing not merely by discussing her latest work, but also by taking a step further Marlene Goldman’s recent and cogent suggestion that Brand pursues a “politics of drifting” in her writing (22). Goldman suggests that, in reading Brand, examinations of belonging are insufficient, bounded by the limits of an earlier politics of identity that relies upon static modes of being. Instead, the notion of drifting, which Goldman derives from Brand’s *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, is used to show how Brand “offers an alternative to the boundedness of home and the nation-state” (13). Drifting, Goldman states, becomes a “legitimate resistant practice” (13) against “both the model of the Euro-American modernist exile, whose desires for belonging are typically nostalgic and directed toward a lost origin — and the model of the immigrant — whose desires are reoriented toward a new home and a new national community” (26). Instead of pledging allegiance to the nation-state or longing for a lost home, drifting between or beyond such positions offers a possibility for creating a new and liberating politics, Goldman suggests. She is supported in this analysis by Ellen Quigley, who suggests that Brand pursues a rhizomatic form of political resistance in her writing, in which one point can connect to any other in order to form communities across borders. Quigley argues that, for Brand, the project of decolonizing the self involves the negation of “legitimate subjects, objects, communities, and origins” (64). That is, old notions of grounded selfhood and belonging are necessarily disrupted in order to uncover a site for being that is open, neither nostalgic nor caught within the politics of inclusion/exclusion or an inside/outside dichotomy.

I wish to push these formulations further by looking at how, in Deleuzian

terms (which both Goldman and Quigley pursue), the drifting or deterritorialization that they examine functions. Deterritorialization is a key concept in the twin *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, one that has been repeatedly seized in analyses of how the contemporary world under globalization functions — that is, by dissolving bounded territories, both at political and individual levels. Alongside this concept, however, comes the key notion of reterritorialization, which accompanies every deterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking.² Movements to decode or decolonize the self by deconstructing or refusing the limited categories of belonging that are available within capitalist society have the potential, in other words, to leave the individual open to being recoded or recolonized by the emerging dominant structures of society. The self needs to remain in motion, pursuing a Deleuzian line of flight in order to escape the domination of contemporary biopolitics, the process through which the body itself becomes subject to legislation and surveillance.³ My intention is to pursue this second half of the Deleuzian equation in my analysis. This is an important point, because Brand’s liberated notion of selfhood risks becoming reinscribed by a loose, cosmopolitan sense of placid globalism if we fail to note that deterritorialization and drifting need to be ongoing processes. Rinaldo Walcott suggests that Brand depicts “the Canadian urban landscape in order to announce and articulate a black presence which signals defiance, survival and renewal” (40). That these are continual projects, constantly renewing themselves, is crucial; Brand’s deterritorializing project is importantly focused upon urban modes of being that constantly work to elude the dominant. *What We All Long For* demonstrates precisely this point in focusing upon protagonists who work actively to construct a new Toronto from below, but whose relatives and friends are caught within a racist system that seeks to limit how their bodies and beings might function. At multiple points, we see characters being physically imprisoned or socio-economically restricted. The system, in other words, seeks to reterritorialize drifting bodies, and ensuring their ongoing motion becomes a key concern in Brand’s novel as her characters mix and merge within Toronto.⁴

We are given a depiction of the city itself as the novel opens in order to emphasize its prominence, and there are good reasons for Brand to focus on the role of cities in the globalizing world. Jacqui Alexander’s “pernicious” internationalism, referred to in my epigraph — that of contemporary transnational capitalism — gives rise to new relations between cities and

the world. Saskia Sassen suggests that the internationalization of financial systems and the dissolution of manufacturing in the West has led to cities being increasingly interconnected in broad, transnational systems that exceed the connections between nation-states. For her, “the transformation in the composition of the global economy accompanying the shift to services and finance brings about a renewed importance of major cities” (*Global* 87). Whether we take these nodal cities as key rhizomatic sites in a new global Empire, following Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, or whether we see them simply as shifting sites of political and commercial congress, it seems clear that the actions of city dwellers shift under continual and increasing migratory movements. Such movements create communities that live in diaspora or exile — as do the focal characters in Brand’s novel. Such racialized communities, in Sassen’s analysis of Tokyo, London, and New York, have been subjected to increasing segregation and economic stratification under the shifts commonly associated with globalization. Increasingly large gaps between the richest and poorest segments of urban society coincide with dominant (usually white) and subordinated racial demarcations, making the global city a site of renewed political tension. *What We All Long For*, by focusing on nomadic communities formed between diasporic subjects, pushes us to recognize ways in which the city presents both an opportunity and a risk. Sassen goes as far as to suggest that global cities, by bringing together both “global corporate capital” and “those who are not fully at home in the modern nation-state (immigrants, internal minorities, discriminated groups, and postsocial subjects),” have made it possible to begin conceptualizing a formal “global citizenship,” one that seeks to replace that of the nation-state systems (“Repositioning” 175–76). That she can make such a claim suggests something of the open-ended modes of being that urban contestations of citizenship present to us.

Such open conceptualizations of urban citizenship, refracted through global routes of migration, are active in the Toronto of which Dionne Brand has long been writing, whether or not we choose to think of it as a “global city” in Sassen’s terms.⁵ Toronto’s shifting demographics, connected to the flows of immigration, present the city with continual and massive generational shifts that change the politics and possibilities of the city itself, even as its exclusionary political structures remain in place. The city itself drifts, in other words; it is therefore important to query how a politics of drifting in Brand’s writing can remain open, how it can escape the narratives of

the limited nation and enable the creation of anti-oppressive spaces for its inhabitants.

The connections between these issues of drifting and belonging are, of course, already crucial to Dionne Brand's writing. In the book *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand's narrator states the following of the focal immigrant women in the novel:

And belonging? They were past it. It was not wide enough, not gap enough, not distance enough. Not rip enough, belonging. Belonging was too small, too small for their magnificent rage. They had surpassed the pettiness of their oppressors who measured origins speaking of a great patriarch and property marked out by violence, a rope, some iron; who measured time in the future only and who discarded memory like useless news. (42–43)

This passage suggests, in its rejection of belonging, that the women's oppressors continue to cling to metaphysical beliefs in origins and static models of being, but these are insufficient for the women of the text — Elizete, Verlia, and others — who transgress borders and seek, when encountering the same, familiar exclusions upon arriving in Toronto from the Caribbean, to form their own links in resistance to oppression. But these links remain tenuous; Elizete moves into temporary refuges, staying with women who hope to find men whose citizenship can ensure their legitimacy, but such citizenship is continually denied, and they are pushed to the margins, hopeful in their shared spaces of love, but excluded by the oppressive white majority. The title, taken from Brand's earlier book of poetry *No Language is Neutral*, becomes pertinent: the line that becomes the title of the novel is incomplete, fragmented in its later form. In its fuller version, it reads, "In another place, not here, a woman might touch / something between beauty and nowhere, back there / and here, might pass hand over hand her own / trembling life" (31). The sense of crossing, of revelling in drifting is couched within the title of the later novel, but the city does not allow it to develop.

Much of the criticism of Brand's writing focuses on these issues of belonging. This focus is not necessarily misplaced, but might now represent an earlier phase of Brand's thinking. She is explicit in recent writing, stating in *A Map to the Door of No Return* that "belonging does not interest" her (85), as Goldman notes (13). In her interview with Pauline Butling, Brand suggests that a desire for belonging, expressed through the notion of home, is a form of nostalgia that feminists of colour need to reject, because it is "really not something that [they] have experienced" (84). It is, however, a theme that

she has explored in depth prior to rejecting it. Heather Smyth thus seizes on “questions about who belongs and who does not” in her analysis of *In Another Place, Not Here* (143), looking for ways of achieving the “full cultural citizenship of Caribbean lesbians in Canada and the Caribbean” (144). While Smyth is aware of ways in which the novel shows that “place, or in particular a sense of belonging to a place, is always deferred” (151), such criticism, looking for utopic spaces of belonging, seems to be invested in the nostalgia to which Brand now objects — even when this criticism acknowledges the etymology of “utopia” as the no-place that Thomas More initially proposed. Bina Toledo Freiwald similarly focuses on the question of “where is home” (38, 39), although her analysis is cognizant of ways in which Elizete “has to name both self and space in order to create places of be/longing for herself” (52). Freiwald observes that Elizete names Toronto “Nowhere” (50), suggesting that the split difficulties of being and longing cannot be named in this absent space. Joanne Saul has recently suggested that Brand has begun to shape “a potentially new way of envisioning citizenry, both national and global, within a world order dominated by the expansion of global capital” (60). This envisioning looks increasingly for modes of being and longing that do not rely on identitarian forms of belonging, pushing towards open, moving politics of coalition-making. Such coalitions push beyond, I think, the ways in which Brand uses “images of collectivity to transcend the subjective dimensions of the experiences of her characters,” as Pamela McCallum and Christian Olbey argue (175). That is, Brand’s writing increasingly pushes beyond the stasis of belonging that such a singular mode of collectivity seems to imply.

In *What We All Long For*, the generation of newcomers is frustrated in their attempts at belonging in a racist country. Tuyen’s parents, Cam and Tuan, are the most important example of this process. Their route to Toronto is one of exile from Asia during the Vietnam war: they leave their home in favour of a refugee camp in Hong Kong, and later depart for Canada. The novel focuses upon these travels because Tuan and Cam lose their eldest son, Quy, as they leave Vietnam. He ends up alone in Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, a place where “identity was watery, up for grabs” as people attempt to escape to somewhere better (9). His parents arrive in Toronto devastated by their loss, and spend their energies focusing upon their search for Quy, leaving their remaining children — Ai and Lam, both born in Vietnam, and Binh and Tuyen, born in Canada — acutely aware of their parents’ loss. Quy, in turn, gives a straightforward assessment of life as an effectively orphaned

refugee. He becomes a hard-headed monk involved in illegal shipments of people before he discovers his family through his mother's ongoing search efforts and then comes to Toronto.

Cam and Tuan, caught in their nostalgia for their missing son and the past, struggle in Canada. They are both insomniac, and Cam becomes fixated on "birth certificates, identity cards, immigration papers, and citizenship papers and cards" (63), laminating and copying them so that her earlier mistake of misplacing her son is not reproduced. They strive to get along in Canada, but they are never allowed by the state to achieve their goals. Cam's medical accreditation is not recognized, and she is unable to successfully retrain in Canada because of her struggles with English, while Tuan's hopes of regaining his career as an engineer slowly fade. Instead, the couple eventually opens a Vietnamese restaurant — the Saigon Pearl — in downtown Toronto, giving in to the stereotypical view of ethnicity that the city foists upon them. They are, the narrator suggests, "being defined by the city" (66), rather than constructing its definition themselves. They hope for better for their children, bidding them to fit into the society around them as best they can, and accepting the discourses of national belonging that are given to them upon their arrival. They find relative comfort in their eventual achievement of suburban dwelling, but continue to be plagued by the loss of Quy. They are thus split between feelings of limited belonging to the nation-state and intense nostalgia, caught sleepless between the two.

The other parents, while less crucial to the novel, display similar patterns. Oku's parents, while not obviously in exile — the novel does not describe their diasporic movements — nevertheless rely upon hard work as a means of gaining acceptance in their new country. Oku's father, Fitz, continually suggests that life was better back "home" (20), evoking a similar, but less immediately pointed, nostalgia to Tuan and Cam's. Both of his parents seem to Oku to be "people who somehow lived in the near past and were unable or unwilling to step into the present" (190). Their feelings of belonging are uncertain, and they prevaricate, longing simultaneously for the past and for inclusion in the present. Carla's family is more complex; her Italian mother, Angie, and her Jamaican father, Derek, never develop a secure relationship, as Derek remains married to another woman named Nadine. Derek struggles for power over women, and is caught in the web of his philandering after Angie kills herself, leaving Carla and her younger brother Jamal in his and Nadine's care. For Jackie's parents, who are named only as the Bernards, the routes of migration remain within the Canadian nation-state, but are

pointedly racialized. Her parents migrate to Toronto from Halifax, following the movements of other family members. Once there, they attempt to fit in within black communities as young, hip, and dangerous people. They devote their time to the Paramount nightclub — a place populated by “black people and a few, very few, hip whites” (95) — until it goes under, after which point their lives turn for the worse. There is a community that the narrator states is extremely “tight” (98), to the point that it relies upon the physicality of nightclubs to sustain itself. The disappearance of these structures prompts the narrative to query who controls the city, noting that communities built from the ground up are threatened by development, by “the constant construction of this and that” by the city’s elites (183). The novel thus seems to suggest several things via the parents: namely, that the scripts of national belonging that they are provided with never fit in a country that operates through what Himani Bannerji has termed “common sense” or everyday racism (77); and, moreover, that communities formed through racial limitations are fragile, given the power of the wealthy and white.

Their children, however, present an alternative by seeing the city as the grounds for their being. Their actions enact Alexander’s call to find home across borders and in the spaces resulting specifically from displacement. In depicting their lives, Brand seems, I think, more optimistic than in her earlier writing. With the parents, Brand sets out a number of the difficulties faced by poor and racialized urban immigrants. With the children, however, possibilities are expressed, even as they face the recriminations of the reterritorializing system. Dionne Brand nevertheless refuses in *What We All Long For* to sentimentalize the struggles of the city, developing a focus that is comparable to Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, in which Toronto is a dizzying place for newly arrived immigrants, whose individual struggles construct the city itself. In the process of building their own lives and labouring in the service of the English colonizers, building works such as the Bloor Street Viaduct, the immigrants in Ondaatje’s novel are, as the narrator suggests, “sewn into history” (149), transforming it in gradual ways through their struggles. Rather than despairing at the external forms of the city and accepting them as loss, the ugliness of the urban is to be contested and altered through both political and artistic action, as well as through simple acts of inhabitation.

The children in *What We All Long For*, born to the city’s immigrants, are Torontonians above all else, and they drift in the city, chasing their desires. Brand states elsewhere that she observes “a becoming” when she rides the

streetcar in Toronto, watching the immigrant and diasporic bodies ride and collide (*Bread* 142), and she begins *What We All Long For* similarly. It opens by zooming in from a general discussion of the city and the way that it smells, “most of all, [of] longing” (1), to a description of three of her protagonists riding the subway. Taking the perspective of a subway rider, the narrator describes Oku, Tuyen, and Carla tumbling onto the subway after a long night out on the city. They are described as, respectively, “a young black man ... carrying a drum in a duffel bag” (2), a woman who is “Asian [and] beautiful in a strange way” (2), and, finally, a woman who is possibly “Italian, southern” (3). These descriptions point towards the uncertainties in their ancestries, and all refuse national identifications. The narrator returns to such physical facts, noting, for example, that Carla is “not phenotypically black” (106), always refusing to construct absolute ethno-national borders in their lives. The narrative voice suggests that their mirth derives in part from their freedom to transgress differences such as those between the segregated communities that characterize much of the city. The protagonists’ hope is infectious, but the narrative voice, reflecting on the thoughts of other passengers in the subway, remains aware of the risks of their self-proclaimed freedom, casting doubts on their futures. Their laughter leads to jealousy in the other passengers as they think back to their own youths and the privileges they have lacked. The narrator imagines another rider thinking of these characters as “free loaders” (4); this rider is reassured by thinking that “life will get them hard some time” (4). Such doubts resurface continually in the novel, again and again representing the risks of reterritorialization and the need for these bodies to remain in motion so that their politics of drifting can remain effective. The nationally divided neighbourhoods of the city are full of “people who are used to the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop” (4), states the narrator, but this motion also has the potential to be liberating for the novel’s protagonists. What remains to be seen is the extent to which it might remain so.⁶

Transformative, open modes of being seem to be readily available to the generation of children born in the city. Carla, Tuyen, and Oku, as well as Jackie, who have been friends since high school at Harbord Collegiate Institute, recognize their diasporic ancestries, but are not in search of either a lost origin or an adoptive nationalism. They are made aware by their parents that they have left their ancestral homes, but, rather than becoming stuck somewhere between an impossible longing for the past home and the present, the children recognize this bifurcation as the site, as Brand elsewhere puts

it, that “opens all nationalisms to their imaginative void” (*Map* 49). Instead of a fixing, limiting door that frames the past, present, and future, this site becomes a doorway for the children, to follow Jody Mason’s distinction in her analysis of *thirsty*, one between times and places. The parents continually request that their children “fit in and stop making trouble” (19), but Canada is not a suitable nation, in that it requires, Tuyen states, “a blonde wig [to] fit right in” (19). The narrator states that the children had

never been able to join in what their parents called ‘regular Canadian life.’ The crucial piece, of course, is 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 or sense 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. (47)

Nor are their ancestral homes sites for national belonging. Tuyen states that she has “some ancient Chinese-Vietnamese shit” to work through (16), but then refuses to name her specific national affinity when Carla asks for it. Instead of seeing themselves as national subjects, the novel is very careful to establish that the children in the novel are Torontonians first and foremost, viewing the city as the site of their being: “their own birthplace” is Toronto, and “they were born in the city from people born elsewhere” (20). Theirs is an urban space that is connected to global modes of living before it is connected to discourses of the nation, and their parents’ attempts to fit into national modes strike them as risible; they thus feel split between “two countries — their parents’ and their own” (20), that of their parents’ nostalgia and their own open, global sense of themselves. They thus focus their struggle work on building and creating transnational ways of being in the city, ways of constructing communities through longing and loving.

Tuyen, in creating an expansive piece of installation art throughout the novel, is perhaps the best illustration of this process of pursuing longings in order to create the city from below. Having fled from the pained nostalgia of her parents, Cam and Tuan’s, she lives downtown on College Street, above a store, and next door to Carla. Her apartment is an assemblage, “a mess of wood rails and tree stumps, twigs and rope, debris, really” (14), which she works into her art. She comes to see the city as beautiful because it is “polyphonic, murmuring” (149), filling Tuyen “with hope” at the “gathering of voices and longings that subsumed themselves up into a kind of language, yet indescribably” (149). Her installation changes over the course of the

novel as she assesses the city, wondering “how she [is] going to execute the collection of longings” that she plans (155). It is, initially, envisioned as a *lubaio*, a traditional post on which people leave notes, in this case “messages to the city” (17). The installation later shifts to a more contemporary mode in which she muses about capturing “the characteristics of her family” (126), and later still becomes a larger, three-room installation whose parameters she is unable to fully imagine (309); it is designed to capture “every longing in the city” (158). In this respect, Tuyen’s art comments metafictionally upon the novel itself, which similarly claims in its title to deliver something of our longings to us. But the longings of the city are expansive, breaking beyond any of the confined spaces that Tuyen — or Brand — might create for them, given that the city itself represents the sum of its peoples’ collected desires. Tuyen is thus engaged in the process of creating her installation throughout the novel, and it remains necessarily incomplete as the novel concludes, given the city’s ever-shifting nature.

Tuyen is motivated in part by her seemingly unrequited love for Carla, which she has harboured since high school. Carla, in turn, struggles throughout the novel to reconcile herself to her loss of her mother as a child, who killed herself after she was unable to secure Derek in her life. Carla also spends the novel struggling with her younger brother, Jamal, who has ended up in the Mimico Correctional Institute for carjacking, the latest of his misdeeds.⁷ Jamal’s path displays the danger of the society of surveillance, one in which his drifting body is disciplined and recoded by a legal system that already looks down upon him for being black. Its exclusions and marginalizations end up constructing, in the circular manner of a feedback loop, a denizen whose behaviour will likely lead to a future of constant discipline. Carla, however, feels free in the city, working as a bike courier, and racing along its streets, entranced by “the minutiae of transient wants and needs” (28) — the small daily struggles of urban living. This job allows her to “ignore the world where you had to fit” (106). She sees “the city as a set of obstacles to be crossed and circled, avoided and let pass” (32), rather than as a series of events to get caught up in. The narrator describes Carla as being “light,” unable to stop her restless movements because “light moves” (29). She sees the risks that Jamal faces in his own restlessness, and attempts to help him, hoping for improvements in his life despite her knowledge that it is difficult to remain free as a person of colour. She recognizes the injustices of racism, telling Jamal that he “can’t be at the wrong place at the wrong time” because he is black (35). Her response is to insist on constant motion.

She comes to embrace an open-ended future, grasping the drifting politics that her friends embody and desire for her, one that is not based on fear but on critically considered possibility.

Oku is also painfully aware of the dangers facing men like himself and Jamal. The police are more powerful than young black men, and imprisonment is always a risk, even without contravention of the legal code. Oku states that being imprisoned is a “rite of passage for a young black man” (46) and experiences arrest at the age of eighteen, caught alone on the street at night, although he is never charged with a crime (164–65). In the course of the novel, he struggles to free himself from his father’s dictates that he should work hard in order to be accepted, knowing the futility of this attempt, while concealing the fact that he has dropped out of a Master’s program in English at the University of Toronto. Feeling that the future’s openness presents a threat to him, and afraid because he does not “know where to go from here” (88), Oku wanders in the city. He is at risk of being pulled into a life of petty criminality, in what he calls “the jungle,” with his friend Kwesi (45), a small-time operator of “a mobile store” who lives by his “wits” (162), one step ahead of the law. Oku’s desires are not limited to finding a community in this space, however, as he desires to experience the world more broadly. He is searching for a life that lies between those choices that he sees available to him: either being “bled out in a parking lot outside a club,” floating “out of his body” like the homeless and insane Rasta and musician with which he speaks on the streets, or else ending up with “the hard-headed bitterness of his father, living in the fantasies of *if only*” (175). He decides to shun Kwesi and the jungle, worried that a life of oppression at the hands of the police leads only to ending “up in the system fighting to get out” (165), pushed into a reactionary mode and never being able to construct a life for himself, always “in prison,” even when “the bars were invisible” (166). Instead, he masters a broad culinary repertoire in distinction to his father’s preference of “the mono-culture of Jamaican food” (132), looking to open boundaries where his father prefers the comfort of the known. His unfulfilled desire for Jackie fills him with hope, and the novel concludes by pushing him towards a future in which he will remain in motion. His hopes lie with his formed community of diasporic friends, his chosen family, who support him and offer him the potential for fulfillment that he seeks.

Jackie is similarly escaping from the limited confines of her parents’ communities. Raised in Alexandra Park, a segregated or ghettoized community in Toronto, she sees her parents’ slow collapse after the Paramount nightclub

closes, and vows to live her life differently, never longing for the Halifax to which her parents wish to return. Although Oku is deeply in love with her, she denies him full access to her, having sex with him but never committing to him in any other way, because, as Oku reckons, she sees in him the return to her parents' way of living, seeming to her "like so many burned-out guys in Vanauley Way" (266), the small street on which her parents live. She runs a small used clothing store on Queen Street called Ab und Zu, which sells "post-bourgeois clothing" (99), and is content with a life of crossing borders.

As such, members of this younger generation live lives that do not adhere to national or racial categories. The nation is void for them, but, as long as the oppression persists, a cosmopolitan celebration of the global coming together of ethnocultural groups is not satisfying either. Tuyen — taking photographs in Koreatown as people there celebrate Korea's defeat of Italy in the 2002 World Cup — is struck at the national lines that demarcate the city, the "small neighbourhoods that seemed at least slightly reconciled" prior to breaking "into sovereign bodies" during the World Cup (203), and is prompted to recall her and Oku's participation in the 2001 protests in Quebec City against the summit to establish the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Their participation is two-sided: the protest excites them, especially Oku, who joins the black bloc anarchists and is arrested after climbing the security fence that confronted residents of Quebec City throughout the summit. At the same time, the divisive, us-versus-them mentality of the protest lingers with Tuyen, who sees parallels between such confrontations and the exclusions of nationalism. Carla takes this sentiment further, as she feels disturbed by the art show that Tuyen mounts of her photos of the protest in their apartment block; to her, it recalls her mother's suicide, an act that signifies for her the ultimate border crossing (206). The exclusions of the city and global capitalism are not to be reversed through the formation of oppositional counter-movements or a reliance upon nationalist communities. Instead, hope appears to lie, for them, in the opportunities that they create to construct urban spaces themselves. They build their communities across borders, rhizomatically connecting to each other without a predetermined logic. They are linked by their desire for inclusivity, and not limited by the discourses that are handed to them.

What We All Long For proposes through these characters that communities existing in resistance to racism, nationalism, and oppression need not be formed on a strictly oppositional basis. Instead, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and

Jackie's lives all suggest in various ways that actively transgressing against borders, while maintaining an openness towards difference and the future, might enable new webs of social relations to form. The novel, in this sense, seems extremely hopeful; its protagonists see "the street outside, its chaos, as their only hope" and they feel "the city's violence and its ardour in one emotion" (212). They are all "trying to step across the borders of who they were" because they are, "in fact, borderless" (213). But the novel also recognizes the difficulty of pursuing such deterritorializing lines of flight. These characters are engaged in "struggle work," and those around them highlight the risks that they face, be it through their parents' unhappiness with life — Oku's father Fitz refuses to answer when his son asks him if he is happy (86–87) — or through the criminalization and discipline faced by Jamal.

The novel ends by further questioning its own seeming optimism. After arriving in Toronto, Quy is reunited with Binh and Tuyen, and they all take him up to meet his parents after his decades-long absence. At the same time, Carla succeeds in getting her father Derek to pay to bail Jamal out of prison. Jamal promptly steals his father's car and picks up a friend; they head north, looking to steal another car, and, in one of the novel's few improbable coincidences, happen upon Quy, who is sitting in the back of Binh's BMW outside of his parents' home. Jamal forces him from the car and he and his friend beat Quy nearly to death. The outcome of this event is left undetermined, and the novel ends with Tuan and Cam coming to see their long-lost son probably die. Jamal will likely be caught, as he has not been careful to conceal his theft of Derek's car, while Tuyen's parents will be devastated. But the significance of this event is also left undetermined; Quy is, certainly, an ambivalent figure, one who exploits the rootlessness of the contemporary world toward his own ends, in a manner that is similar to that of Brand's Toronto-based protagonists, but put towards entirely selfish ends. His likely death suggests an inability to be reintegrated into life in the city, but it is, of course, also an act of chance. This questioning of the novel's seeming earlier optimism, however, does not entirely erase the sense of possibility that the novel contains: Carla has relinquished her younger brother's difficulties so that he can learn to care for himself, and she is moving towards a future in which she will be free to create sustaining communities, and her friends are discovering ways in which they can remain mobile. Not everyone will escape from the reterritorializing gaze of the society of racialized surveillance, but it remains possible that the freedom for which these characters all long might be realized. There is optimism to be found in the city, but a

great deal is left to chance; its geography returns again and again in mentions of snowstorms and traffic flows, which disturb “the pretence of order and civilization,” leaving people “bewildered as they should be, aimless and directionless as they really are” (105), caught in the unending struggle work of being urban and global citizens.

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NOTES

¹ Such a splitting of the term is already enacted in Bina Toledo Freiwald's analysis of “the complex relations between being, longing, and belonging” in her essay on Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* (38).

² In *A Thousand Plateaus*, we are thus told, for instance, that “one never deterritorializes alone; there are always at least two terms ... and each of the two terms reterritorializes on the other” (174).

³ Such analyses have been increasingly prevalent in criticism of the cultural processes of globalization. Neil Smith contends that analysts of the global order tend to overlook the way in which any deterritorialization is accompanied by a subsequent reterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, and pushes analysis back in this direction (51).

⁴ At the same time, the drifting bodies that face restrictions should keep us from maintaining any simplistic celebration of motion; for many, such as those facing exile, movement is not desired or empowering. For a recent assessment of the politics of motion, see Brydon.

⁵ Sassen suggests, in the second edition of *The Global City*, that there can be no single, empirical way of judging what constitutes a global city (354–55). Toronto has certainly seemed eager — if not anxious — to be perceived as a global city in the five years that I have lived in it. Pico Iyer, writing in *The Global Soul*, provides one bridge for thinking about Toronto in Sassen's framework by naming it as a global city (121), but it need not be formally named as such for us to be able to read the ways in which its citizens and denizens are affected by global flows. The editors of the recent volume *uTOpia: Towards a New Toronto* aver that “a city, by its very nature, is not owned; it is shared” (McBride and Wilcox 11). That is, the city is constructed from below, contested, and re-formed into a new place at every instant.

⁶ Jody Mason usefully pointed me towards a parallel line in *thirsty*, in which the narrator speaks of a longing for “a waiting peace, for life, for just halting” (22). While movement remains a valuable asset to Brand's protagonists in *What We All Long For*, it is important to note the ways

in which it is a motion that they largely control and elect, not one that derives from enforced migrations or otherwise.

⁷As such, Jamal's experiences run parallel to Brand's description of her own visit to Mimico in *A Map to the Door of No Return* (107 ff.).

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