

**UM LUGAR AUTÔNOMO NA CIDADE GLOBAL: UMA INTERPRETAÇÃO
DE “WHAT WE ALL LONG FOR”¹ DE DIONNE BRAND****AN AUTONOMOUS PLACE IN THE GLOBAL CITY: AN INTERPRETATION
OF DIONNE BRAND’S “WHAT WE ALL LONG FOR”****UN LUGAR AUTÓNOMO EN LA CIUDAD GLOBAL: UNA
INTERPRETACIÓN DE “WHAT WE ALL LONG FOR” DE DIONNE BRAND**

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Resumo: Dionne Brand cria personagens com aspirações peculiares em seu romance *What we all long for*. Em Toronto, Quy, Tuyen, Carla, Oku e Jackie têm suas infâncias e origens moldadas pelos espaços urbanos que ocupam. A autora apresenta os conflitos entre imigrantes no Canadá e seus filhos, nascidos no país, à medida que esses jovens vagam em Toronto. Quanto essas tensões são naturais nos relacionamentos entre pais e filhos? De que maneira eles são mais difíceis por causa da experiência dos imigrantes? Neste artigo, destacamos o personagem Oku para apontar que a tensão nas relações entre pais e filhos se assemelha às tensões entre os sujeitos diaspóricos e a cidade global. Concluimos que Oku tornou-se mais consciente do seu potencial de atuação na constituição de sua identidade. O principal conceito que norteou essa interpretação foi o de reterritorialização, como proposto por Kit Dobson (2006).

Palavras-chave: Sujeitos Diaspóricos; Geografias Emocionais; Literatura Canadense.

Abstract: Dionne Brand creates characters with peculiar aspirations in her novel *What we all long for*. In Toronto, Quy, Tuyen, Carla, Oku and Jackie have their childhoods and origins shaped by the urban spaces they occupy. The author elaborates the struggles between immigrants in Canada and their children, born in the country, as these young people drift in Toronto. How much are these tensions natural in child-parent relationships? In what ways are they more difficult because of the immigrant experience? In this paper, we focus on Oku to point out that the strain in child-parent relationships resembles the tensions between the diasporic subjects and the global city. We conclude that Oku became more aware of his potential to act upon the development of his identity. The main concept that guided this interpretation was that of reterritorialization, as proposed by Kit Dobson (2006).

¹ Nota de tradução: “to long for” pode significar ansiar, desejar, esperar. Uma tradução possível para o título seria “O que todos ansiamos”.

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Keywords: Diasporic Subjects; Emotional Geographies; Canadian Literature.

Resumen: Dionne Brand crea personajes con aspiraciones peculiares en su novela *What we all long for*. En Toronto, Quy, Tuyen, Carla, Oku y Jackie tienen su infancia y orígenes moldeados por los espacios urbanos que ocupan. La autora presenta los conflictos entre los inmigrantes en Canadá y sus hijos, nacidos en el país, mientras estos jóvenes deambulan por Toronto. ¿Cuán naturales son estas tensiones en las relaciones entre padres e hijos? ¿Cómo son más difíciles debido a la experiencia de los inmigrantes? En este artículo, destacamos al personaje Oku para señalar que la tensión en la relación entre padres e hijos es similar a la tensión entre los sujetos diaspóricos y la ciudad global. Concluimos que Oku se volvió más consciente de su potencial para actuar en la constitución de su identidad. El concepto principal que guió esta interpretación fue el de reterritorialización, propuesto por Kit Dobson (2006).

Palabras clave: Sujetos Diaspóricos, Geografías Emocionales, Literatura Canadiense.

1. INTRODUCTION

What we all long for is a novel by Dionne Brand, who is also a poet, essayist, professor and activist. She is an awarded author who lives and portrays the experiences of women, immigrants, African American and queer people. Brand was born in Trinidad and Tobago and moved to Canada after she graduated from high school. “What we all long for” was published in 2005, it is a fiction novel with lyrical flow. This piece was chosen to be the subject of this article because of its compelling story for the drifting, deviant readers.

In *What we all long for*, the author presents characters and their longings in Toronto. Quy, Tuyen, Carla, Oku and Jackie have their upbringings and their paths intertwined with the urban spaces they occupy. The author unfolds the tensions between immigrants and their second-generation children, as these young people drift in Toronto. How are these struggles typical of child-parent relationships in general? In what ways are they complexified by the immigrant experience? In this paper, we concentrate on Oku to argue that the strain in child-parent relationships is analogous to the tensions between the diasporic subjects and the global city. Here we resort to the idea of “inescapabilities of places” Bruce Robbins (1998) to understand the global city.

Major cities are the places where financial headquarters, anchor tenants, transportation systems and artistic scenes meet the wealthy, workers, students, and beggars. Toronto is this kind of place, and Brand works with these encounters in the novel, giving vivid descriptions of this cosmopolitan place. According to Bruce Robbins cosmopolitanism is a contestation of politics within and beyond the nation, we argue that this understanding of cosmopolitanism, Kit Dobson's ideas on drifting (DOBSON, 2006) and *What we all long for* (BRAND, 2005) inspire a resistance practice against the western hegemonic designs and national stereotypes.

2. DEVELOPMENT

Oku was born in Toronto, but his family is of Jamaican origin. He is a 25-year-old poet and English Literature master's student who lives with his parents and is in love with his high school friend, Jackie. Oku is in conflict with his father, Fitz, who boasts about providing for the family and urges that Oku gets a job, but Oku thinks his father is a small-minded man. He is embarrassed that he still depends on him, but, when he tried to move out, Fitz made him feel silly because he would be giving white people his money while he could be helping the family (BRAND, 2005, p.65).

Oku is black and fears that his university titles won't help him, he realizes the dangers he faces, the police and imprisonment being a constant risk, even without breaking the law. Fitz is nostalgic about his past back home and expects that his son follows his steps of working hard in construction jobs, but Oku isn't interested in any of that. He is a sensitive young adult, who struggles to be autonomous doing what he is driven by in a market-oriented world. The character likes to read, he writes poetry and is passionate about music, so a Literature major was his choice. Oku lacks confidence in who he is, because he still hasn't found an autonomous place. He needs his own space, he needs privacy to have sex with Jackie and he needs to be out of his judgemental and controlling father's sight to do what he wants to do and fully develop his determinations in life.

Oku is still grasping the highlights of his personality and abilities: he deeply understands and appreciates jazz and is an amazing cook, fusing Jamaican and Indian cuisine. These traits, which he learned with his parents and with Indian-descent

Kumaran, draw Jackie to him and bring his friends closer together. According to Dobson (2006, p.7) “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.” Oku drifts between some cultural influences he learned with his family, such as music and cooking, but he drifts beyond when he is afraid of either turning into a man like Fitz or into a criminal, the nation-state label that is put on him. At the same time, he does not conform with these solid positions of origin, he is unaware of his inventive and attractive side as a global citizen.

Trying to elaborate and perform an identity in terms of the parents’ prospects for who they expect you to become is similar to trying to fit into the hegemonic culture of the nation state, whose power emanates from wealth and white privilege. The concept of drifting is meaningful both for the child fumbling his way away from the sterilizing parents’ home and the diasporic subject looking for a position in a corporate & nation ruled territory. Strictly following the caretakers or parents’ guidance to develop an identity is like trying to belong in the status quo defined by the state, it means inertia, inactivity and lack of protagonism.

Drifting, or not belonging, means resistance, openness, movement. For Dobson (2006), actively transgressing against borders, becoming open towards difference and the future, might enable new webs of social relations to form. In Saskia Sassen’s perspective (SASSEN, 1998), this original politics of identity and culture have made it possible for traditionally marginalized actors to make claims on the city and to find their voices. Oku is in the process of realizing that, in order to find his voice, he needs to part with his parents confining shelter, but, at the same time, value the personality traits he developed with his multi-ethnic relations with his family heritage, the English language, and the friends he met and chose to hang out with.

Family setting is a relevant aspect of one’s personality. In Oku’s case, his traditional family prescribes a male breadwinner lifestyle for him. The reader is introduced to Fitz and Claire, Oku’s parents. Fitz works and Claire doesn’t. Fitz asks “Who put food on this table?” in the middle of an argument (BRAND, 2005, p. 117). Oku feels pressured by the moneymaking goal he is supposed to have in life. This is why he is tempted to sell illegal goods with a fellow at the expense of living within the

law, he also wonders if he should take a construction job, as Fitz offers him this safe option to make money and to follow the father's steps.

A parent refers to his own life experience to bring up a child. At early ages, this intuitive knowledge and the limited perspective of the infant are a convenient match. As the kid grows older, leaves the home and meets other role models, there is a dialectical formation of the individual's personality. Constant confrontation between the upbringing and the external world foster the constitution of unique subjects. One of these confrontations happens between Oku and his father when they talk about his course. Fitz is confused that he doesn't get report cards from Oku's studies (BRAND, 2005), he says that he has already put enough money and effort but doesn't see Oku returning anything to the family. Oku, an adult taking a postgraduate course, feels offended that his father still expects him to get report cards and to answer to him. Fitz wants Oku to fit into his role model of bringing money to help the family, but Oku has grown, he has seen other family settings and intellectual jobs qualification. Oku is divided between making a living and studying, he is also trying to figure Jackie out to seduce her. In a way, he wants to do what his parents did in terms of romantic relationships, a steady connection, because he wants to have more than sex with Jackie. In this sense, Oku is again drifting between what he longs for and his upbringing.

Oku visits Jackie's neighborhood, Alexandra Park, in order to understand her. "So he had resolved that if he wanted her, he would have to know what she knew, walk where she had walked, and figure out the things that had given shape to her. Alexandra Park was one of those things" (BRAND, 2005, p. 152). Oku realizes that Jackie wasn't comfortable in her parents' house, when he remembers the only time he and his friends went there in high school. He notices that she had always lived in an underprivileged neighborhood, even poorer than his own. As a grown man, he could understand that the politics and the history of the city had the center and the periphery patterns of public development and social interaction. The real-estate deals, the cultural buildings and the beautifying of the seashore were for the high level, rich people. In Alexandra park, such politics were of no importance, the trade was made in terms of street control through violence and bad reputations. There were no trees or flowers in the neighborhood, the buildings were scarred, the walkways were dry.

had it been a garden instead of that dry narrow roadway, Jackie's childhood might have been less hazardous. People defended that park, saying to the city, in so many words, Don't drop all your negative vibes on us, we're trying to live the same as everybody, but if you couldn't see it in your heart to put a garden in here, if you tarred over every piece of earth, then don't blame us (BRAND, 2005, p. 154).

Jackie's parents argued in front of her, her father was arrested, both her mother and her father had their dreams destroyed and drank heavily. When Oku is determined to interpret the impact of Jackie's upbringing in who she is, he believes that she wants to distance herself from that unpleasant past, but at the same time she owes some kind of loyalty to that neighborhood and to her parents. Oku gets that having a white German boyfriend and a store between the poor and the trendy areas of the city are Jackie's way of defining who she wants to be, moving away from poverty, but still keeping her identity. He fears that Jackie will see him as more of the ill-fated Alexandra Park, and won't ever consider having a relationship with him.

The reader can visualize Oku's insight to understand Jackie, and the same ideas he has to develop an interpretation of Jackie's search for her identity could apply to his own circumstances. In Milligan and Davidson's words (DAVIDSON; MILLIGAN, 2004, p. 523), "Our emotional relations and interactions weave through and help form the fabric of our unique personal geographies." As Oku is in the middle of this walk and these reflections, he tells himself he had been stuck. "And he had hung on anyway to the idea that one day she would notice him and bring him into the present. And he had been passive in this, seeming to do nothing to actually get there with Jackie" (BRAND, 2005, p. 119). Oku realizes things about his own life because he decides to learn about Jackie's life, his attempt to grasp her emotional relations have an impact on his perception of himself, as if the emotional geography he perceives in Jackie heightened his intrapersonal perception. He feels inspired to act in the future, he can realize some of his determinations as he realizes Jackie's determinations. We believe it's possible to make these inferences based on the following passage:

He knew that to Jackie he probably looked like so many burned-out guys in Vanauley Way. Young, but burned out, so much wreckage. How could he tell her that he wasn't wreckage? How could he, when he was depending on her to tell him that? What could he tell her then? Number one, that he wasn't a player. He would have to shed any ambivalence about that. Number two, he wasn't her father. He would

never allow that look to come into his eyes, the wry look, the defeated look, the bitter look. He was going to work the rest of the summer, the rest of the year, then go back and finish the master's. Why? Because he loved that, and what he loved he wasn't going to have taken from him or give up. Next, he had held her, he had felt her, he was certain, he simply had to be there. Jesus, who was he promising all this to? All right then, himself. He was promising this to himself (BRAND, 2005, p. 156).

Oku and Jackie are drifting away from their families' heritage and trying to find their autonomous place in the cosmopolitan city. Jackie's family moved inside Canada, from Halifax to Toronto, they were black, Jackie's mother was from Nova Scotia (BRAND, 2005, p. 71) and they hung out with other black immigrants from the Caribbean. The Africans were taken to the Caribbean coerced by the slave trade in the colonial period and their diaspora spread to Canada, a country that was also a colony, but had fewer enslaved people taken to work there compared to the Caribbean islands. Oku and Jackie, both have Caribbean ascendancy and both are trying to define their cosmopolitan identities in a territory that is mostly governed by white people.

The characters in "What we all long for" are the new generation of global cosmopolitan citizens, although the definition of citizenship is open to debate. They are Canadian, they were born there, but they are cosmopolitan because of their ancestry, they are a new kind of cosmopolitan people. The notion of cosmopolitanism is changing due to globalization. Cosmopolitanism used to be understood as a kind of rupture with the ties and affiliations that bind the lives of people to nation-based practices and belongings. It used to be a privilege to be a cosmopolitan person, who could travel and afford the ride to knowing other cultures and spaces. More recently, with the expansion of the transportation network and the awareness that forced transit, such as refugee flows, also leads to cosmopolitanism, the idea of an exclusive privilege is not always associated with cosmopolitanism. According to Bruce Robbins (1998, p. 1), the concept of cosmopolitanism is becoming

transnational experiences" that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged - indeed, often coerced. Cosmopolitanism should be defined, Rabinow writes, as "an ethos of macro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness (often forced upon people) of the inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates.

The coercion and the inescapabilities affect the first generation and the second generation of migrant characters in the novel in very particular ways. Oku and Jackie's parents had job opportunities in construction and in a comb factory, they probably wouldn't have considered the options that their children do, running a thrift shop and studying language. The life choices of Oku and Jackie demand a kind of reading of the cosmopolitan culture they are interacting with. Jackie likes fashion and she needs to understand the tendencies to select the collection of clothes in her shop. The name of the store also has a connection with reading and translating cultures "Ab und Zu", "now and then", in German. Oku's choice of an English major also has a cosmopolitan aspect, because he studies the language of the people that historically enslaved and brought the Africans to America. Oku's father can speak English very poorly, and Oku wants to study it deeply. Oku believes he has an inescapability in Jackie's eyes, he is black, but he doesn't want her to see him as the stereotype many black young men are characterized by.

In Diana Brydon (2006, p. 1) and David Scott's view, this novel deals with the issue of "political presents and with how reconstructed pasts and anticipated futures are thought out in relation to them". For Jackie, the political present is her project to make a living out of the hype thrift store, she is a reader of fashion magazines, such as *InStyle* and *Black Beauty* (BRAND, 2005, p. 69), probably because she likes fashion and needs it for her job. She is also a persuasive salesperson.

Jackie's reconstructed past is the nostalgia of her parents of Nova Scotia, where she doesn't want to go back to. She only remembers the people who took care of her as a child, the grandmother, the lady from the library and two train riders that played with her and helped her go to the toilet. Her reconstructed past is about emotional memories, not places. It is a child's perspective of emotional geographies, so Jackie remembers the library and the train with the people that showed affection for her.

In her present, the reader can try to anticipate her future in relation to her occupation and to her relationships. Jackie pays more attention to her customers than to her boyfriend, Reiner (BRAND, 2005, p. 69). She feels apart from Reiner and in control of herself. She is attracted to Oku, but "she despises people who don't know what is going to happen to them" (BRAND, 2005, p. 69), she believes Oku is innocent, he makes her feel anxious, liquid, out of control (BRAND, 2005, p. 74) and she wants to

feel in control. The reader sees that Jackie sleeps with Oku again, but we don't know if it's going to be a casual thing or if she will share more than sex with him, as he would like. The author leaves it open if Jackie will give in to passion and uncertainty with Oku or continue with Reiner, who is safe both in terms of how she feels and in offering a space for her business. Her future can be anticipated as an open possibility.

For Oku, his political present is deciding what to do with his life: continue depending on his father, getting a job or an illegal one, quitting his master's or catching up with it, doing something about Jackie or keeping it a possibility. They are all choices of acting or not acting. Some of Oku's reconstructed past are the nostalgia that he despises about his family and the high school memories, when he realizes what he, Jackie, Tuyen and Carla had in common: as second-generation migrants: they couldn't fit in the hegemonic Canadian culture. In this passage the reader sees he wants to leave the reconstructed pasts behind and is aware of some inescapabilities of a second-generation migrant:

they took nothing home, no joy and no trouble. Most days they smoked outside school together, planning and dreaming their own dreams of what they would be if only they could get out of school and leave home. No 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. 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 (BRAND, 2005, p. 47).

Oku knows that their parents past hadn't been his past, and that leaving home could mean finding his autonomy and his space in the city. It was a dream in high school, but it turned out to be a difficult process in his present, both because because of the child-parent relationship and the tyranny of the nation-state with black underprivileged young men.

After the Alexandra Park walk, the author shows that Oku decides not to remain passive in this difficult process of finding his voice and his independency. His anticipated future is also an open possibility, but Oku is enlightened with what to do for becoming in charge of his life. If he continues his master's, he can have a qualified job in the long run, if he gets a job for the moment, he can reduce the father's pressure and

if he insists with Jackie he can find out what kind of relationship she wants with him (BRAND, 2005).

Oku is sorting out his identity through the process of finding his autonomous place in the city. It is an ambitious project to define one's identity in the XXI century. According to Hall (2006, p. 9), there were structural changes in society at the end of the XX century, such as mass communication, world patterns of consumption, information technology network and global transportation. These transformations are disintegrating national, ethnic, racial, sexual, gender and class cultural sceneries. People need something to look up to as a standard of living to build their identities. In the past, the nation, the race, the gender, etc. had provided stable positions to look up to and to define ourselves as social individuals. More recently, the contact with a global and cosmopolitan world is changing how personal identities are defined. The idea of a single integrated subject is no longer acceptable, there is an identity crisis for the contemporary individual and Oku is feeling like that. The character notices the limitations he accepts living with his parents and the injustices he faces as a young black man, also, in his resolutions he understands that he doesn't need to remain passive, it's a step in the process of defining his identity.

Oku is drifting away from his home and from the stereotypes the state puts on him. For Dobson (2006), the concept of drifting was refined with supporting ideas from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, according to her, drifting becomes a deterritorialization process in the current globalized world because individual and territorial boundaries are constantly dissolved, but there is also an ongoing reterritorialization.

3. CONCLUSION

The dominant structures of society are always recolonizing and recoding the individuals if they are not consciously acting upon their journeys to avoid that their bodies become subject to surveillance and legislation, in other words, to escape the domination of biopolitics. The surveillances Oku needs to avoid are of his family's perspective of a stable male breadwinner role and the state's through the police's, which presumes black people are more likely to be criminals. This drifting towards defining

his aspirations and his identity is a resistance against the dominance and the violence of the historical past and the nation-state.

Dionne Brand says in a speech at Barnard College (BRAND, 2017) that she does not believe in justice and that she writes against tyranny and towards liberation. For the characters in *What we all long for* their present is marked by their immigrant heritage, even though they were born in Canada and are citizens of the country. It is an inescapability of their ethnic traits, it is an injustice, especially for the black men. Oku, Carla, Jackie and Tuyen are noticed in the subway, when they laugh; they will never be seen as white Canadian people. They also have universal family issues to find their autonomy, just like in any child-parent relationship, the families have expectations for the children's futures based on their generation trajectories. Oku has his struggles to find his place and his identity complexified by the second-generation immigrant experience, because besides having to decide if he wants to fit into his father's expectations for him to bring another income to the family, he has to handle the prejudice that exists against black men in an intellectual position. Only by doing so, he will be able to take control of his ambitions and solve his identity crisis, at least for this moment. The oppression of the state and the family won't disappear, but Brand writes a character that turns conscious of his possibilities towards freedom and autonomy in the city.

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