# Navigating “Small Objects of Foreignness”: Walking in Search of Decolonial Resistance in the Metropolis of Toronto

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**Abstract:** Too often, totalizing discourses about the nature of the global metropole attempt to control its social and political story and render it an idealized object rather than a space of discrete subjects and perspectives. Walking the city is an act of social experience that allows the urban wanderer to see what has previously been hidden or inaccessible. Urban rambling reveals the ways in which racial and ethnic minorities have been colonized and marginalized, and how their communities have been rendered invisible as well. This paper examines how the metrolingual and metro-cultural practices of cosmopolitanism combined with the micro-strategies of decolonization serve to provide a counter-place to the dominant space of the Toronto city landscape. I frame this investigation with Dionne Brand’s novel, *What We All Long For*, as a narrative background, complemented by my own experience of aleatory urbanism through several Toronto neighbourhoods to explore the ways in which individual communities resist and re-negotiate the hegemony of settler-colonial municipal and linguistic practices.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitanism, decolonization, metrolingual, settler colonialism, translation

**Résumé**: Les discours totalisants sur la réalité de la métropole mondiale tentent encore trop souvent de contrôler son récit sociale et politique et d'en faire un objet idéalisé plutôt qu'un espace possédant une diversité de sujets et de perspectives. Marcher dans la ville est un acte d'expérience sociale qui permet au vagabond urbain de voir ce qui était auparavant caché ou inaccessible. La randonnée urbaine révèle ainsi comment les minorités raciales et ethniques ont été colonisées et marginalisées, et comment leurs communautés ont également été rendues invisibles. Cet article examine donc comment les pratiques métrolingues et métro-culturelles du cosmopolitisme, combinées aux micro-stratégies de décolonisation, servent à fournir un contre-lieu à l'espace totalisant du paysage urbain de Toronto. Pour ce faire, je mène cette enquête en me servant du roman de Dionne Brand *What We All Long For* comme toile de fond narrative et de ma propre expérience d'urbanisme aléatoire dans plusieurs quartiers de Toronto en explorant comment les communautés résistent et renégocient l'hégémonie des pratiques municipales et linguistiques coloniales.

**Mots clés** : cosmopolitisme, décolonisation, métrolingue, colonialisme de peuplement, traduction

**Resumen**: Demasiado a menudo, los discursos totalizadores sobre la naturaleza de la metrópoli global intentan controlar su historia social y política y la convierten en un objeto idealizado en lugar de un espacio de sujetos y perspectivas separados. Caminar por la ciudad es un acto de experiencia social que permite al deambulante urbano ver lo que antes estaba oculto o era inaccesible. El deambuleo urbano revela las formas en que las minorías raciales y étnicas han sido colonizadas y marginadas, y cómo sus comunidades han sido tornadas invisibles también. Este artículo examina cómo las prácticas metrolingüísticas y metroculturales del cosmopolitismo, combinadas con las microestrategias de descolonización, sirven para proporcionar un lugar que contrarresta el espacio totalizador del panorama urbano de Toronto. Enmarco esta investigación, con la novela de Dionne Brand, *What We All Long For*, como fondo narrativo, complementada por mi propia experiencia de urbanismo aleatorio a través de varios vecindarios de Toronto para explorar las formas en que las comunidades individuales resisten y renegocian la hegemonía de las prácticas citadinas y lingüísticas coloniales-de asentamiento.

**Palabras clave**: cosmopolitismo, descolonización, metrolingüístico, colonialismo de asentamiento, traducción

**Resumo:** As capas dos livros como materiais visuais expressam o que o público leitor pode esperar dos textos. Elas indicam a visualidade discursiva que conecta os códigos culturais com as reações inconscientes. Uma olhada rápida para as capas dos livros turcos traduzidos para o mercado de livros de língua alemã mostra que as capas das obras contendo a palavra “Istambul” em seu título são

“decoradas” com mesquitas e minaretes. Tendo esta observação como ponto de partida, este artigo visa questionar as motivações implícitas deste caso especial com foco nas traduções literárias selecionadas do turco para o alemão, obras não literárias sobre Istambul e produções literárias nativas escritas em alemão. A análise indica que Istambul guarda uma imagem pré-definida, fixa e clara na mente dos leitores e profissionais de língua alemã.

**Palavras-chave**: capas de livros, visualidade, Istambul, publicação de traduções, circulação de literatura

> …as he walked toward the university, he saw the musician sitting on a concrete embankment, his leather folder in his lap, his large hands making a gesture of piano playing. Oku slowed his pace, trying to decide whether to take another route and avoid another unpleasant encounter. But he saw that the musician was heedlessly playing his symphony. His face was a beautiful mask of pleasure, his long fingers lustful on some arpeggio. Oku walked by close enough to observe these things and far enough away to run if the musician recognized him.
> (Brand 173)

> The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or the statements uttered.
> (de Certeau 97)

Through the urban wandering of countless literary characters, readers all over the world have become intimately familiar with both local and foreign city landscapes. Acting as guides, authors like Charles Dickens in nineteenth-century London, James Joyce in twentieth-century Dublin and Miral al-Tahawy in twenty-first-century New York, take their audience on tours of native cities and adopted cities, and slowly reveal the individual and communal struggles of their inhabitants. Dionne Brand’s novel *What We All Long For* is yet another exceptional example of wandering through the metropolis. Tracking the life stories of the four primary, first-generation Canadian characters, Tuyen, Jackie, Oku, and Carla, the audience cycles, walks, rides, and ambles through many of Toronto’s multicultural and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Their urban ramblings reveal not just the ways in which racial and ethnic minorities have been colonized and marginalized, but how their communities and neighbourhoods have been rendered invisible as well. Despite their apparent lack of power however, each character witnesses and engages in their own individual acts of decolonization. They, like the real inhabitants of the global city of Toronto, find ways to negotiate and challenge hegemonic power structures and the erasing effects of racially based settler colonial culture. Using Brand’s novel as a backdrop, complemented by my own experience of aleatory urbanism through the Parkdale, Chinatown, and Kensington Market neighbourhoods of Toronto, I examine how the metrolingual and metro-cultural practices of cosmopolitanism and the micro-strategies of decolonization serve to provide a counter-place to the dominant space of the city landscape.

Before commencing my journey however, I find it necessary to reflect on the manner in which I arrived in Toronto, to situate myself in this city that is not my native home, but one in which I have become a settler. I begin with an acknowledgement of my

own privilege. I am a white female scholar, originally from Ireland where I grew up under the shadow of a nation trying rather unsuccessfully to emerge from the ravages of British colonization. The Ireland of my childhood was deep in the throes of the horrific sectarian violence between Catholic and Protestant factions in the northern part of the country, known as "The Troubles." It was also an extremely poor country, its economy often equated with those of the Third World/Global South or developing nations. It could take years to get a telephone installed in a house and many of my relatives living in the West Region did not have indoor plumbing. My family was quite nomadic, and I alternately lived in Ireland, England, the United States, Canada, Spain, and Germany, leaving and returning to many of these countries more than once. In each migratory situation, I found myself accepted or rejected in varying degrees. In response to my early childhood travels, I was treated as a cosmopolitan in the Irish schools I attended, while my English classmates laughed at me for being a "Paddy" and my Irish and English cousins (mostly good-naturedly) derided me for being a "Yank." Burdened by these negative experiences, when I moved to the United States, I worked hard to change my accent so that I would not sound different and could more easily assimilate into an American classroom. Here the colour of my skin provided an easier transition, and while I mostly succeeded with the transformation of my accent, I would still unwittingly betray my European roots by using incorrect words such as rubber for eraser, car boot for trunk, and petrol for gas. My Irish ethnicity however, proved to be one of my most valuable assets, as more often than not when I acknowledged my origins, I was enthusiastically informed that my co-conversant was also part-Irish.

My Canadian experience was different yet again, and it was my connection to Britain that facilitated my assimilation into Canadian society. I quickly learned that "being" American was not something to be proud of, and neither was being Irish, but being British had the potential to open many doors, particularly those relating to government employment and immigration status. Germany and Spain posed a different set of challenges, primarily revolving around language. It took several months of residence before I was confident enough to converse freely with local residents and even then, my command of grammar was initially limited to the present tense. In Spain particularly, I found myself communicating in multiple languages throughout the day, often switching between English, Spanish, German, and French depending upon the nationality of the people I encountered in my place of employment, on the street, or in entertainment venues. My experiences in each situation required careful observation and navigation of local customs, cultural and political values, linguistic and culinary practices before my integration into the community could be effectively achieved. By the time I arrived in Toronto, I was well-practiced in the art of fitting or tuning into a new space, a practice that always began with an exploration of my surroundings.

The simple act of walking, according to Michel de Certeau in his treatise *The Practice of Everyday Life*, is a "process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place…a space of enunciation" (97-8). Walking through the city is a way to experience the lived reality of an urban space, and in so doing, make it a place of memory, of resistance, of creation and communication. For de Certeau the city is divided into the concept city and the real city. The "concept city" is a utopian idea founded on the ordered production of space and "univocal scientific strategies" (94) that serve to

homogenize the nature of the city and elevate it to a universal subject. This city, "like a proper name, thus provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties" (de Certeau 94). Or so the city planners, architects and technocratic powers that plan, govern, and organize the city would have its inhabitants believe. There is a totalizing discourse here that attempts to control the social and political story of the city and render it an idealized object rather than acknowledge it as a place of many discrete subjects and a multitude of perspectives. Walking the city provides the opportunity to selectively interpret its nature or topology; it is an act of social experience that allows the urban wanderer to see what has previously been hidden or inaccessible. Small acts of resistance become possible with urban wandering. In "Taking Sides: Urban Wandering as a Decolonial Translation Practice in the Americas," Joshua Martin Price notes that urban wandering allows the researcher to re-interpret the city landscape; it is a decolonizing method that enables the members of multicultural, metrolingual cities to speak their own truths and challenge the hegemony of colonial linguistic and cultural practices. Urban wandering provides a moral compass, a way of "tuning in[to]" the truths and experiences of others, and in so doing allows for an expanded understanding of a community or place. Similarly, Sherry Simon, in *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, claims that to stroll through "the city is to know the combination of familiarity and strangeness, the *elsewhere within*, that is the modern condition" (6). The streets act as a mirror of those divisions that define modern consciousness, the divisions of race, ethnicity, language, gender, poverty, and immigration.

The city of Toronto is a concept city. Urban planners and architects, the city council and well-connected developers are constantly renewing neighbourhoods, extending transportation routes, expanding pedestrian and bicycle zones, and reclaiming land to expand housing and commercial capacity. The burgeoning population of the city requires this extensive effort of permits, planning, destruction, and construction. City planning began in earnest in the years following World War II with the release of the *Planning Act*

Fig. 1. Toronto City Skyline 2020. Photo: Geraldine Rossiter

of 1946, the provincial *Don Valley Conservation Report* in 1950 and the subsequent foundation of the Metro Federation in 1953, which was comprised of the townships of

North York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, and the city of Toronto. Constant growth, primarily through immigration and migration from rural areas to the city, has resulted in the emergence of an area known as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), which houses a population of approximately six million residents (Sewell, Sorensen). According to André Sorensen, the unique urban form of the GTA is a "product of the actions during the last 50 years of a robust set of planning and development control institutions" (245). The process of development has positively impacted the city's development in that significant services such as clean water, sewage treatment, electricity, roadways, and municipal investment in those services enabled the achievement of a "modernist vision of suburbanization and in the process has created a highly planned and relatively compact metropolitan region" (Sorensen 246). Mervyn Horgan, in language reminiscent of de Certeau's Icarian flight above New York City, refers to this functional view of city planners as the "city of birds," an urban experience where "city space is treated instrumentally, where planners' activities are organized around the designation and specification of uses…viewed from a position that is some distance from the lived experience of urbanity" (64) In this instance of the city, its "traditional cartography renders space as a purely physical entity independently influencing and organizing urban populations" (65). It is essentially a place of control and homogeneity, one that is informed by the discourse of dominance, organization, and administration. However, as both Horgan and de Certeau note, these global metropoles are peopled with subjects who continually challenge the governance and administration of the organizing bodies.

Toronto is more than a grand city plan, a concept on a map or architectural drawing. It is a compilation of discrete neighbourhoods, each with their own unique ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and geographic attributes. It is a cosmopolitan city, or perhaps more accurately has the potential to be one. In *Translation and Identity,* Michael Cronin notes that cosmopolitanism is comprised of five specific elements: the ability to transcend the nation-state model and embrace transnational realities; the capacity to mediate between the global and the local; a rejection of a fixed notion of belonging; an ability to negotiate complex alliances; and the power to set itself apart from identity politics through emancipation from organizing communities (20). As a concept city, or a city of birds, Toronto officially cleaves to its identity as a Canadian city, albeit a multicultural one. Yet as a transnational meeting place, it is informed by the constant influx of immigrants who pass through its borders from all corners of the world. Toronto has been a landing site for immigrants for over a century. In the twenty-year period between 1945 and 1965 alone, almost a quarter of Canada's 2.75 million immigrants found their way to Toronto (Li 17). This trend has only continued and now almost fifty percent of the residents of Toronto are immigrants (Statistics Canada).[1] The various waves of migrants have settled in different neighbourhoods and established their own enclaves where they set about recreating the languages, customs, and cultural practices of their homelands. As the city's inhabitants move throughout this sprawling urban space they interact with and adapt to the changing conditions of the city landscape.

There is one more critical component to the landscape of Toronto: The fact that it is a settler city, one built on unceded Annishnabeg and Mississauga Rice Lake and Credit

[1] According to the 2016 Census, 2,705,550 of Toronto's 5,852,855 residents are immigrants. This can be contrasted with the total Ontario population of 13,242,160 of which 3,852,145 or an additional 1,146,595 are immigrants (Statistics Canada).

River territories on land claimed by colonists through several treaties, including: the Head of the Lake Treaty of 1806; the Toronto Purchase Treaty originally negotiated in 1787 and revised in 1805; and several smaller treaties concluded in 1811 at Port Hope (Miller 84-90). However, colonial rights to this land are contested and common acknowledgement of Indigenous land rights refers back to the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt, which is emblematic of a much older treaty amongst the Great Lakes Indigenous Nations. According to the Ogimaa Mikana project, the “Dish with One Spoon is a common diplomatic metaphor…considered among the early treaties between the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee and also among the first that French and English settlers were welcomed into” (*Ogimaa Mikana* par. 7). As a settler colonial city, Toronto must negotiate not only its multicultural heritage but also its ongoing colonial practices, those totalizing processes that marginalize or disappear certain populations and communities living within the confines of the city limits. María Lugones, in her works on decolonizing feminism, refers to this as *coloniality*, which is not just the classification of a certain group of people in relationship to a colonial power but “the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the process of subjectification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings” (745). This is an important distinction, because through this process of coloniality race, poverty, mental health, gender, ethnicity, and linguistic, cultural, and religious practices are all subject to marginalization and oppression by the dominant power structure. Resistance to the dominance of prevailing colonial attitudes can be observed throughout the city, if the urban wanderer is prepared to look for and acknowledge the various acts of subversion aimed at challenging hegemonic control. Throughout this paper, I will seek to highlight these decolonizing activities, but first it is necessary to spend some time understanding decolonial theory and its practical applications.

In "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality," Walter Mignolo claims that decolonization “means working towards a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ” (459). Using Anibal Quijano’s thesis on the coloniality of power as a foundation, Mignolo asserts that the current dominant and hegemonic worldview is essentially Eurocentric, and that all Western knowledge (both its practice and formation) has been not only privileged but imposed upon both colonized peoples and non-European/white races. Quijano’s thesis is that race is a modern construct, one that evolved through the colonization of non-white races. “Social relations founded on the category of race produced new historical social identities…that were…relations of domination, such identities were constitutive of hierarchies, places and corresponding social roles” (534). Race for Quijano became the basis for current modern social classifications. Mignolo takes this argument further and maintains that Western knowledge practices are also modern colonial constructs and that de-colonization can only occur when Western knowledge is no longer a totalizing or universal epistemology. In order to challenge Western knowledge practices, Mignolo proposes a de-linking of knowledge sources and practices that “brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics” (453). By rejecting universal notions of Western power and embracing a “geo- and body politics of knowledge” (453) that incorporates alternate worldviews, it becomes possible to decolonize the mind. De-linking requires a fracturing

of hegemonic knowledge and a de-naturalizing of concepts that totalize specific reality. It makes room for a “pluri-versal world” (463). Decolonization begins, therefore, when marginalized and disenfranchised subjects can participate in knowledge creation, production, and distribution. One critical means of decolonization is through de-linking Western thought grounded in the “six imperial and vernacular languages of modernity” (493) and to include other languages and methodologies into the matrix of power.

Fig. 1. Queen St. sign with Parkdale Neighbourhood designation, 2021.
Photo: Geraldine Rossiter

The practical questions that arise from the necessity of decolonization are concerned with how to successfully fracture knowledge and embrace a multiplicity of worldviews. They ask how Western knowledge and linguistic practices can make room for alternate ways of knowing. The global or cosmopolitan city is one potential response to these questions. And urban wandering is the first step in addressing them. In the summer of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I made my own attempt at urban wandering. Using the streets and places named in Brand’s novel as a guide, I began my journey on Queen Street where it intersects with King Street and Roncesvalles. The Parkdale community (which begins at this intersection) is relatively easily identified as a low-income neighbourhood through the shabby storefronts, many selling “antiques” that are little more than household junk and industrial detritus. Second-hand clothing stores, like those owned by Jackie in Brand’s novel, and small mostly take-out restaurants cater to a population that has little disposable income. But Parkdale is also one of those neighbourhoods that is undergoing gentrification. Roncesvalles bustles with upmarket, upscale restaurants, specialty shops and fashion stores. Just north of Queen are neighbourhoods where homes sell for upwards of a million dollars, while south of Queen, to the Gardiner Expressway, are densely populated towers of low-income apartment rentals or once beautiful Georgian style houses that have been turned into multi-family dwellings. Queen Street itself (and Parkdale as a neighbourhood) has an ambivalent relationship with the city. As Basile notes, it was “built *over*, rather than *in relation to*, the land’s natural topography of valleys and waterways,” (86) an imposition on the geographical undulations of the land. Once home to a large indigenous population, it was founded in 1879 as an autonomous village built on Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississauga land governed by the Dish with One Spoon Treaty and subsequently annexed by the city in 1889 (Epstein 709). Its proximity to Lake Ontario and the Sunnyside Amusement Park made it an appealing location for both wealthy residents as well as the

poor, the working-class, and immigrants. As the latter flocked to the neighbourhood, tenements and what were known as shacktowns began to proliferate, which caused such an anti-immigrant, racist reaction that the only Canadian chapter of the Ku Klux Klan was formed in Parkdale in 1925. By 1950, the demolition of Sunnyside and the construction of the Gardiner Expressway caused a mass exodus of the wealthy and middle class, leaving the neighborhood to its impoverished residents. But twenty years later, the proximity to the city was enough to reinvigorate developer interest and the middle class took up residence once again and actively competed with the incumbents for control of the neighbourhood. In the 1990s, relations between the poor, homeless, and racialized communities and the wealthier primarily white residents, catalyzed by a new bylaw that temporarily prohibited the establishment of new low rent “bachelorettes” and a city proposal to dramatically limit land use through zoning and permits (measures clearly designed to displace the poorer residents), had reached such a boiling point that the city ordered a process of mediation between the two sides (Epstein 714). Although the mediation achieved a level of understanding and better relations were superficially established between the two groups, skyrocketing rents, reclamation projects and land prices have continued to force low-income inhabitants into ever smaller sections of the neighbourhood, if not out of it altogether. “What rules the street today,” claims Basile, is “the logic of real estate speculation, gentrification, and a homogenizing trend towards upwardly mobile and fast-paced cosmopolitanism” (86). This is emblematic of the constant cycle of violence of settler colonialism, particularly as it pertains to land. The process of urbanization or gentrification is produced by racializing practices that consistently seek to dispossess Indigenous people and communities of colour of their right to live within the city (Tuck and Habtom 241).

Brand begins her novel with a land acknowledgement. As she describes the streets of the city that provides the background for her story, she writes:

> There are Italian neighbourhoods and Vietnamese neighbourhoods in this city; there are Chinese ones and Ukrainian ones, Pakistani ones and Korean ones and African ones. Name a region on the planet and there’s someone from there, here. All of them sit on Ojibway land, but hardly any of them know it or care because that genealogy is wilfully untraceable except in the name of the city itself. (4)

When I first came to Toronto, I had little cognizance of the ongoing structures of settler colonialism and their impact on both racialized and Indigenous communities. But thanks to the efforts of activists and scholars who refuse to remain silent, I have become aware of how “Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island still claim and make and renew and enact relationships to land and water through ceremony, resurgence, presence, and rearticulation” (Tuck and Habtom 243). As I neared the intersection of Queen and Dufferin, I searched for a recent example of such presence, the decolonizing reclamation project Ogimaa Mikana, which, in concert with the Idle No More movement, sought to replace several Toronto street names with Indigenous names and had also erected a billboard at the intersection of Queen Street West and Gwynne Avenue. The project, which began in 2013, sought to reclaim Annishnabeg “territories from an alien landscape committed to erasing us while contributing to the growing Indigenous cultural, political and linguistic revitalization efforts across Turtle Island” (par. 5).

Fig. 3. Current billboard, 2021. The Ogimaa Mikana billboard is available at this link. Photo: Geraldine Rossiter

At its core, the Ogimaa Mikana project is a primary example of the de-linking strategy proposed by Mignolo. Hunt and Stevenson call it a "guerrilla mapping" technique, one that serves to "contest the colonizing work of dominant mapping practices, and to assert alternative, potentially decolonizing geographies" (373). Proposing that mapping techniques demonstrate hegemonic colonial practices, Hunt and Stevenson maintain that cartographic tools visually represent the totalizing effect of colonial practices on Indigenous and black people. Maps are the colonial interpretation of the land; they draw borders that represent parcels of land owned or taken by settler colonists and the municipal governing bodies. They are informed by racial practices and, like language or Western knowledge systems, work to solidify Eurocentric or white control. "Maps demarcate contested territories, represent institutionalized power, and in many ways, fix the terms of future negotiations" (Hunt and Stevenson 375-6). They graphically represent the universal view of Horgan's city of birds. What they do not do is represent the lived experience of its inhabitants. In fact, they often serve to erase that lived experience, both present and past. Urban maps need streets, which are typically named after colonial heroes, leaders, and places. Queen Street is a prime example, originally named Lot Street, it was renamed to honour Queen Victoria in 1843 (Basile 86). This is what the Ogimaa Mikana project sought to contest: the erasure of Indigenous history through the de-linking of colonial naming. Questioning the value of street names to the lived experience of the urban wanderer, de Certeau asks: "What is it then that they spell out? Disposed in constellations that hierarchize and semantically order the surface of the city, operating chronological arrangements and historical justifications, these words…slowly lose, like worn coins, the value engraved on them" (104). Their value is only relevant to urban planners and officials. For the subjects of the city on the other hand, it is the physical street, the physical neighbourhood comprised of a lifetime of experiences and memories that is of any worth. The Ogimaa Mikana project was an exercise in countering the power of the municipality, and the nation-state of Canada. It was one example of a decolonizing process through "which Indigenous peoples articulate their presence on and right to defend ancestral lands, territories and resources against state encroachment" (Hunt and Stevenson 376). It was a way of challenging Western knowledge and

vernacular languages and providing an alternative worldview to the city of Toronto. Unfortunately, when I reached the intersection of Queen and Gwynne, the billboard showcasing the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt was gone, as were all the street signs that had been replaced by the project. However, there may be a possibility to begin to right this particular wrong. In 2020, thousands of Toronto city residents sent a petition to the city council requesting a name change for Dundas Street, which was named after a Scottish politician with no ties to Toronto and who had worked to delay the abolition of slavery. Despite the steep price tag of changing street names, subway station names, business names, maps, libraries, and parks, the city council voted in favour of the proposition in July 2021. Proposals are currently being accepted for potential replacement names, providing a unique opportunity to engage with Indigenous leaders and create a space of mutual recognition.

Meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities is another means of decolonizing city planning efforts. Current city narratives erase and ignore Indigenous presence in the city. Leela Viswanathan refers to the process of designating that First Nations peoples live on reserves while settlers live in the cities as a process of municipal colonialism and argues that for any reconciliation and mutual respect to occur, Indigenous communities need to be included in the process of urban planning. In 2014, the Ontario Provincial Policy Statement was revised to recognize First Nations' rights and the need for direct consultation with Indigenous communities in land use planning, although this did not include the need for their consent. While the requirement for engagement demonstrates progress, there is more work to be done before genuine and effective collaboration can take place. Viswanathan cites Dale Turner's call for Indigenous "word warriors" to participate in the discourse of legal and political action, for leaders within First Nations communities who "can move between Eurocentric and Indigenous languages and epistemologies" and translate between the lived realities and needs of Indigenous lives within the city and local planning efforts (Viswanathan 162). But city planners must also be prepared to engage with and a find common ground that goes beyond the symbolic recognition of rights. Rather, there needs to be active engagement and even a reassignment of priorities in order to meet and meaningfully fulfill treaty obligations.

Fig. 4. Examples of Chinese language signage in Chinatown, 2021.  Photo: Geraldine Rossiter

The tenor of Queen Street began to change the closer I came to Spadina and soon I found myself in the middle of Toronto’s Chinatown. Originally, Chinatown was centered along Dundas and Bay Street, but multiple dispossessions in the 1960s, euphemistically called urban renewal projects, resulted in its relocation further west. The current boundaries of Chinatown are College Street to the north, Queen Street to the south, Bathurst to the west and Beverly Street to the east (Phan and Luk 302). It is located in what geographers refer to as a “zone of transition,” usually adjacent to a central business district and formed by an expansion of business and industry out from that core (Phan and Luk 302). Most Western Chinatowns are situated in these zones of transition, somewhat purposefully chosen in order to take advantage of industries, warehouses, transportation routes, and most importantly, convenient locations for newly arriving immigrants (Phan and Luk 303). Within moments of my arrival, I felt as if I had entered a different city (if not country). The majority of pedestrians had Asian features, and dragons and other Chinese symbols abounded, painted on walls or scrolled over gateways and entryways. I was visually assaulted by the plethora of signage in either Cantonese or Mandarin (I have no knowledge of either language or the symbols that represent their written form so cannot accurately identify either). Almost every building bore several signs in both Chinese and English characters. Here, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the streets were bustling, cars and people out in abundance. Those that I could hear speaking to each other were primarily communicating in their native, non-English languages. While there was an acknowledgement of English on the signs, it felt more like an obligation than a choice or an embracing of one of the official languages of Canada.

For decades, Toronto has been experiencing significant population growth, in large part due to the number of immigrants finding refuge or new lives within the city. Many of these immigrants do not speak English or speak it only at a rudimentary level. The 2011 census revealed that over 45% of Toronto’s population spoke a native language other than English or French (Hebert 23). This figure remained relatively constant in the 2016 census, with 43% of residents speaking a mother tongue that was not one of Canada’s official languages. These émigrés rely on their children, friends, or sponsoring families to help them communicate with authorities, government agencies, schoolteachers, and healthcare workers. In Brand’s novel, Tuyen, whose parents are Vietnamese, reflects on the burden placed upon her by her family to interpret for them:

> Binh [her brother] and Tuyen were born in the city, so they were born under the assumption that simply being born counted for something. They were required to disentangle puzzlement; any idiom or gesture or word, they were counted on to translate. Cam and Tuan expected much from them. As if assuming a new blood had entered their veins, as if their umbilical cords were also attached to this mothering city, and this made Binh and Tuyen not Vietnamese, but that desired ineffable nationality: Western. For Tuan and Cam, their children were their interpreters, their annotators and paraphrasts, across the confusion of their new life. (67)

In her own desire to fit in, to be worthy of that Western moniker, Tuyen as a child embraces the language of her country, rejecting the language of her parents by “refusing

to speak it. At five she went through a phase of calling herself Tracey because she didn't like anything Vietnamese. She used to sit at the cash register, her legs hanging from a stool, reprimanding people older than she to speak English. 'English, English!' she would yell at them" (Brand 21). Yet her parents could never integrate fully into white Canadian society. They set up a Vietnamese restaurant that catered to Vietnamese clientele and tried somehow to navigate the divide between South Asia and North America.

Chinatown itself is a multiethnic, multilingual neighbourhood. Although promoted as Chinese, primarily Cantonese speaking, it is actually peopled by immigrants and groups that identify as Sino-Vietnamese (both north and south), Vietnamese (both north and south), Korean, Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian. The signs that I, with my untrained eye, thought might be in Mandarin or Cantonese are actually multilingual, many in Vietnamese, Laotian, or Cambodian. Like so many multiethnic communities, Chinatown has been homogenized by dominant narratives promoting it as a tourist destination with a single Chinese identity. While initially populated primarily with Hong-Kong and Guangdong Chinese, these original immigrants, as they acquired wealth and social status, have moved out of the city and created several more Chinatown enclaves in the suburbs. They have been replaced by Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese, mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, and other South Asian groups (Phan and Luk 297). Even though they occupy the same physical space, these groups are separated from each other by language, social, and cultural differences, although many learn enough Cantonese and English to conduct business or find work. While these first-generation immigrants primarily move within their own ethnic circles and cater to Chinese, Vietnamese, and other South Asian consumers, their children, like Brand's characters Tuyen and her brother, form the bridge between East and West and often use their knowledge of Western language and consumer preferences to expand or change businesses to attract a more diverse (and Western) clientele (Phan and Luk 313-314).

Fig. 5. Street art in Chinatown, 2021. Photo: Geraldine Rossiter

As I wandered through the streets of Chinatown, an immigrant myself, I understood the need for familiarity of language, the need for meaningful symbols, the desire to conduct the daily business of life without the mental exhaustion of having to translate my needs and desires to a shopkeeper, bank clerk, or pharmacist. I understood the need to walk into a butcher shop and see the types and cuts of meat that I was used to cooking, prepared in a way that suited my palette. Life as an immigrant is strange; new customs and ways of doing business are foreign. Communities that bring with them the customs and cultural practices of the home they have left behind do so as much for survival as for nostalgia. Each neighbourhood attempts to replicate that sense of home, but they are enclaves in this larger metropolis that houses so many communities, this cosmopolitan metropole that enables an ability to transcend the nation state of home while facilitating a new transnational or metro-cultural reality.

Citing Lewis Mumford, Cronin notes that the multicultural city is "the world writ small, within its walls can be found every social class, every people, every language" (17). These global cities are growing in importance because of the influence that they are beginning to wield on an increasingly globalized world. The global metropoles, Cronin asserts, "by bringing together a plethora of different cultures, languages, identities, are seen as an inexhaustible reservoir for the renewal of the cosmopolitan spirit" (17). Cosmopolitanism enables a mediation between the global and the local. Here, in this global city of Toronto, these negotiations are happening every minute. It is a place where the new cosmopolitanism, what Cronin terms micro-cosmopolitanism, can challenge the hegemonic culture of settler colonialism. Interestingly, he calls this a "cosmopolitanism not from above, but from below" (15). This dimension "helps thinkers from smaller or less powerful polities to circumvent the terminal paralysis of identity logic…through a patient undermining of conventional thinking from below" (16).

The metrolingual, and what I call the metro-cultural practices of Toronto's ethnic communities that result in the interactions between the settler population, Indigenous peoples, and immigrants constantly undermine the predominant culture of settler colonialism, consistently challenging, undermining and rewriting what it means to be a Torontonian. Cronin posits that micro-cosmopolitanism, "by situating diversity, difference, exchange at the micro-levels of society, challenges the monopoly (real or imaginary) of a deracinated elite on cosmopolitan ideals by attempting to show that elsewhere is next door, in one's immediate environment" (16-17). For Brand's artist, Tuyen, "that was the beauty of this city, it's polyphonic murmuring. This is what always filled Tuyen with hope, this is what she thought her art was about – the representation of that gathering of voices and longings that summed themselves up into a kind of language, yet indescribable" (Brand 96). As I wandered through Chinatown, those thoughts flitted through my mind. I have always been peripherally aware of the diversity and metrolingualism of this city. I hear it in the coffee shops I frequent. I see it on the York University campus and on Bay Street, Yonge Street, and in the libraries, grocery stores, and local markets. Cronin likens this to a conception of *particular* or fractal differentiation. He notes that static "theories that conceive of culture as reducible to a finite set of discrete texts and translators operating within national boundaries isolate the particles but only tell half the epistemic story" (22). From a national or global perspective, these fragmented particles may appear to make up a hegemonic whole but in reality are constantly changing and adapting to new situations and pressures. They are "mutable mobiles" that have no stable configuration

but are still recognizable and it is the job of the translator to simultaneously convey both the similarity in difference and meaning as they traverse time and space.

Fig. 2. Kensington Market - part of the Black Lives Matter slogan can be seen painted on the street., 2021. Photo: Geraldine Rossiter

In many ways I am a trespasser in this, my adopted city. These feelings only intensified as I made my way through Kensington Market. Here, sound was the first indication of something foreign or unknown. The sound was familiar, but not that of an everyday familiar; it was the sound of reggae music. It was a sound I associate with holidays in Barbados or the Virgin Islands, or even on beach vacations in Mexico. It is not the sound of music that I choose to listen to when driving in my car or sitting down to write or work. Rather, it takes me somewhere else, somewhere that I visit but do not belong. Kensington has long been a destination area for immigrants, beginning with the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh in the 1880s, who then moved out as Jewish refugees from the Second World War found their way in, along with large numbers of Portuguese immigrants. The amendments to the Immigration Act in 1962 also made it possible for larger numbers of non-white/non-European immigrants to find their way into Kensington Market, which by 1971 had more non-Canadian than Canadian-born inhabitants (Li 17). I materialize in Kensington with my white skin, holding a camera like a tourist. Thanks to the pandemic, the streets are quiet, which only serves to strengthen my sense of being out of place. Here, colour is the language of communication, not the frantic signage of Chinatown. On one street is a beautifully painted “Black Lives Matter” slogan. Each letter is brightly decorated with intricate and diverse patterns and designs. I regard the sign for a while, thinking that although I am white and feel out of place, I do not feel unsafe. I think about Oku, one of Brand’s characters, wandering the streets of his native city of Toronto late at night, who is stopped and frisked by police and thrown in jail for the night, just because he is black. There is a police car parked in front of me on the street. It is vacant and the first police car I have seen today. I am the stranger in this

neighbourhood, yet it is the residents who are patrolled and placed under surveillance. Oku had been walking home because he had no money for a taxi or even a streetcar. He had simply surrendered himself to enjoying the warm summer evening when a car came up behind him and stopped:

> Two cops came out of the car. One cop reached for him. He can’t remember what they said or what they wanted. He only remembered that it was like an accustomed embrace. He yielded his body as if to a lover, and the cop slid into his arms…He remembered how instinctively his arms opened, how gently, as gently as they would have opened to embrace Jackie. But this was another kind of impeachment…They took him to fifty-two Division. They couldn’t find anything to charge him with and let him go around 6 A.M. (Brand 2016, p.165)

In the next few paragraphs Oku reminisces about his friends who resist discriminatory policing practices, those who demand their rights and find themselves incarcerated and permanently remanded into the custody of the system. As I regard the “Black Lives Matter” slogan, I think about George Floyd and his unnecessary death. I think about a nine-year old girl killed in her backyard in Texas by police. I think of the fact that I can walk down any street at night unmolested by the police, but a young Indigenous girl will not have the same freedom in Saskatoon. Our experiences are fragmented; they are different, in many ways the products of our external identities, the colour of our skin, or the outward indications of our religious beliefs, our economic situations, or our linguistic practices. We live in a “city of worms” that “sets out from the standpoint of individual activity…the flow of individual experience. It seeks the communicative tools with which to articulate resonant meaning-filled accounts of the flow of urban experience” (Horgan 67). As opposed to the city of birds, a city that is objectified, planned, and analyzed, the city of worms is meant to be subjective, immersed in, lived in. Rather than being physically removed, a coordinated means to an end, the city of worms “attends first and foremost to life” and lends itself to the “meaningful, affective, the emotional. It is the subject of the best kinds of ethnography—‘peopled ethnography’—aimed at developing deep understanding of urban living from specific points and places embedded in the world” (Horgan 67). In this city of worms, as I participate in my own form of aleatory urbanism, I am made aware of how my encounters with these Toronto neighbourhoods have changed my experience of the city. I am encountering Horgan’s own serendipitous moment, the one that jolts me out of my habitual interactions with the city, those that have been primarily limited to the West End, or the transitory visits to restaurants, galleries, and shopping malls. This moment changes my perspective as I interact with the previously unknown or unthought about. Horgan notes that the “serendipitous fragment is not a means to an end, but rather a beginning, a kick start for a new synthesis and a driver of theoretical innovation” (62). It is an encounter that loosens the grip of time and space on rationality and allows for new interpretations of urban theory, an aleatory urbanism that creates a “context of discovery” (63) where the researcher becomes open to new interpretations and modes of representing the urban.

Fig. 7. Street art in Kensington Market, 2021. Photo: Geraldine Rossiter

My own reaction here is closer to that of Price when he discovers how colonial concepts have become so ingrained in his own worldview that it took this process of “tuning in” to seriously question what had been habitual before. Taking the Situationist practice of the “dérive” as his own form of urban wandering, he notes that “signs of colonial order are all around, obvious, proximate to the observer or researcher. Up close [and this is the important observation], the participant researcher can also apprehend insurgent, anticolonial meanings, even while noticing the oppressive, hegemonic meanings they oppose or invert” (70). Here, he uses translation practice not so much to understand linguistic practices but to oppose the notion of “benign translatability” (70). Colonialism is not just an oppressive and racializing structure but is also a contest over meaning. “Focusing on translation as a question of attention [therefore] provides a moral compass that is simultaneously a linguistic key” (Horgan 71). This is Price’s process of “tuning in,” a process that understands what colonization means to the oppressed, how groups of racialized and marginalized communities interpret and internalize the politics of colonization. In order to modify the colonial conceptual framework, it is important to practice “experience-near” translation practices, where borders (geographic or cultural) are crossed and identities become much more fluid. It means moving from the macrolevel, which I interpret as Horgan’s city of birds, to the microlevel—the city of worms. This microlevel, near-experience approach enables not just a translation but a transformation of meaning across both sides of the colonial divide. This transformation becomes the result of a two-way process of translation, one that crosses both physical and cultural borders. Robert Young notes that while translation is often thought of as a process of cultural appropriation or subjectification, it can also “invoke power through acts of resistance” whether through the ability of Indigenous languages or cultural acts to defy translation or in the experiences of metropolitan migrant cultural translators who “encounter other translated men and women, other restless marginals, and translate their experiences to each other to form new languages of desire and aspiration, circuits of activism, routes of affirmation” (144).

Here in Kensington Market, I am acutely aware, as I have never been before, of the signs of insurgency and anticolonial sentiment. I see the paintings on the wall and

slogans on the street as not only indicators of home, a bordered community within the larger community of Toronto, but also as an example of the cultural complexities or the fractal differentiation that Cronin affirms remain constant in either a macro- or micro-environment. The street art here is vibrant, and its presence is its own act of de-linking. Desmarais and Larivée maintain that “Indigenous street art [and that of other marginalized groups] sidesteps the Western Institutions that determine formalized recognition of a professional artist; the education system, galleries, arts journalism, granting bodies” (109). It is a means of presenting an alternate worldview, of suggesting a different way of presenting artistic interpretation, of bringing awareness of issues that are ignored by the hegemonic value systems of the concept city. It is an “unmediated storytelling medium for the marginalized voices to take control of their individual and collective selfhoods” (Desmarais and Larivée 109), a means of fracturing Western knowledge and participating in the creation and production of new ways of knowing. In and of themselves, none of these decolonizing micro-strategies bring about long-term change, but by their insistence, by their constant presence in our neighbourhoods and our communities, we gradually become aware of their subversion of hegemonic knowledge and communication practices. Tuyen, as the representative artist in Brand’s novel, understands this as she realizes that her translation powers have given her more than a means to negotiate on behalf of her parents, but that “her distance from them, as the distance of all translators from their subjects, allowed her to see that so much of the raison d'être of their lives was taken up negotiating their way around the small objects of foreignness placed in their way” (Brand 125).

Although representing artifacts of the hegemonic culture into which Tuyen’s parents can never fully assimilate, through the process of transformation these small objects of foreignness can also translate into decolonizing practices. They are the seeds that are planted and eventually grow into what de Certeau calls “trees of gestures,” those acts that can transform and whose “rhetorical transplantation carries away and displaces the analytical, coherent proper meanings of urbanism” (102). The process of coloniality evident in the sometimes violent and acquisitive practices of the settler population and municipal governments requires that migrant and racialized communities and Indigenous residents subversively resist its dominant narratives. Sherry Simon notes that often “the translation that takes place within the city is covert or implicit” but that the “processes of translation take place below the surface of the city” (10). These processes are manifested in small acts of resistance: the renaming of street signs, the privileging of non-Western languages on storefronts, objects of art such as dragons in scrollwork or images on walls, and slogans painted on the streets. They challenge the dominance of colonial attitudes and through their own process of de-linking illuminate pathways to decolonization and other worldviews. We only need to take to the streets, to open our senses to the clues that are painted, written, worn, sung, played, and spoken all around us to understand how strongly this current of decolonization runs through the city. My own experience of urban wandering has provided me with a new ability to decipher the codes around me, to look for what was previously hidden and seek out alternate ways of knowing. The view from below, from the city of worms, has become a decolonial method of analysis and research, one that can contest the normalizing narrative, that enables discussion about how subjective experience impacts a worldview, and that demonstrates the necessity of translating across the divide.

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