

DIASPORA, HOME, AND FAMILY IN *WWALF* AND *CERTAINTY*

DIASPORIC APPROACHES TO “HOME” AND FAMILY IN  
DIONNE BRAND’S *WHAT WE ALL LONG FOR* AND  
MADELEINE THIEN’S *CERTAINTY*

By

KAREN NGUYEN, B.A.

A thesis

submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by Karen Nguyen, August 2008

Master of Arts in English, 2008  
McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario

Title: Diasporic Approaches to “Home” and Family in Dionne Brand’s  
*What We All Long For* and Madeleine Thien’s *Certainty*

Author: Karen Nguyen, B.A. (University of Waterloo)

Supervisor: Professor Donald Goellnicht

Number of pages: v, 115

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the first and second diasporic generations' approaches to "home" as represented in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* and Madeleine Thien's *Certainty*. Brand and Thien offer nuanced and counter-intuitive conceptualizations of "home" that emerge in the house, city, and world at large. The authors demonstrate how one's achievement of "home" does not only entail a negotiation of these spaces, but also of familial relations. This thesis argues that the first generation's "diaspora consciousness" is a trait that the second generation inherits and transforms. This second generation exhibits more of a "transnational consciousness," a term that this thesis offers to describe the nomadic lifestyle of the second-generation characters.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis was a labour of love and would not have materialized without the help of some wonderful people. In particular, I want to thank my kind and knowledgeable supervisor, Don Goellnicht, for his consistent encouragement and guidance throughout this past year. He trusted my judgment, which enabled me to write with confidence. Also, I want to thank my first reader, Helene Strauss, for her enthusiasm after reading each chapter draft. Finally, thank you to Grace Kehler, who stepped in as a second reader at the last minute and provided some insightful perspectives during my defense.

Family, which is a major theme in *What We All Long For* and *Certainty*, is likewise a major theme in my own life. My family is the inspiration for this thesis.

*For my family.*

## Introduction

Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For (WWALF)* and Madeleine Thien's *Certainty* portray the process of resettlement for diasporic families. Each text is a window into the diasporan's "home," a site in which his identity is continuously (re)formed. This thesis focuses on how the first and second diasporic generations conceive of and attempt to create "home" in the "adopted" or "host" country, Canada, and how they negotiate the gaps between this host country and their original homeland. Dispersion is not an insular process experienced by the first generation alone, but one that transgresses spatial, temporal, and psychic "borders," having a profound effect on second and subsequent generations. Ultimately, the diasporic past is inherited by successive generations. This thesis examines such intergenerational inheritance with specific reference to two Asian diaspora communities as represented in the texts: Vietnamese Canadians in *WWALF*<sup>1</sup> and Malaysian/Indonesian Canadians in *Certainty*.

Great interest in diaspora has emerged within the past three decades. Various theorists such as Robin Cohen, William Safran, Khachig Tölölyan, Steven Vertovec, and James Clifford have proposed criteria for what constitutes a diaspora, a term that has become increasingly difficult to define. Precisely because of the breadth of its meanings, this introduction explores the term "diaspora."

Safran notes that "[t]oday, 'diaspora' and, more specifically, 'diaspora community' seem increasingly to be used as metaphoric designations for several

---

<sup>1</sup> *WWALF* deals with other diaspora communities in Toronto, but a thorough examination of them is beyond the scope of this thesis.

categories of people—expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*" (83). No longer does "diaspora" exclusively denote the exiled Jewish community, what Safran calls the "ideal type" (84), but the term now denotes any community that disperses from a single homeland. Some authors have opened up the concept of "diaspora" even further. For example, Walter Conner redefines "diaspora," applying the term to "that segment of a people that lives outside the homeland." In response to Conner's redefinition, Tölölyan writes: "It is easy enough to claim this for the first generation of any group of immigrants, they bear the homeland's and nation's marks in body and speech and soul. But in what sense does the fourth generation of Japanese Americans or tenth generation of African Americans whom we now call a diaspora remain a segment of the people in the homeland?" (29). His question is valid and chapter three of this thesis grants attention to how dispersion impacts subsequent generations of a family. Tölölyan goes on to assert that

in order to be recognizable as a segment, it is necessary to exist as a collectivity

. . . To participate in a community, diasporic individuals must not only have identities that differ from those prescribed by the dominant hostland culture, but also diaspora-specific social identities that are constructed through interaction with the norms, values, discourses and practices of that diaspora's communal institutions . . . A diaspora is never merely an accident of birth, a clump of individuals living outside their ancestral homeland, each with a hybrid subjectivity, lacking collective practices that underscore (not just) their difference from others, but also their similarity to each other, and their links to the people on the homeland. (29-30)

Different theorists use the term "diaspora" in different ways. This thesis does not adhere to Tölölyan's definition, which is fairly narrow, but relies on Cohen's more comprehensive definition. Cohen, building upon Safran's definition, lists the common

features of a diaspora, paraphrased as follows: 1) traumatic dispersal from an original homeland to two or more foreign regions; 2) or, the expansion from a homeland for the purposes of work, trade, or colonialism; 3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements; 4) an idealization of the homeland and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even creation; 5) the development of a return movement; 6) a strong ethnic group consciousness based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate; 7) a troubled relationship with host societies; 8) a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and 9) the possibility of a creative, enriching life in host countries (*Global Diasporas* 26).

According to Cohen, a diaspora usually includes many, but not necessarily all, of these criteria. His definition allows for wider application to varied situations.

This thesis enters existing debates and discussions on diaspora, with special attention devoted to intergenerational issues, and enriches the body of research on second-generation Canadian diaspora literature, which has been virtually devoid of Vietnamese Canadian texts written in English up until 2005 with the publication of *WWALF*.<sup>2</sup> Tamara Seiler asserts that “‘second generation’ literature is often framed as confessional, a somewhat risky act of ‘breaking the silence’” (9). The second-generation characters in both texts are in a unique position – Canadian-born, racially marked, and not too far removed from diasporic origins – to comment on issues of “home” and

---

<sup>2</sup> The status of *WWALF* as a “Vietnamese Canadian” text is a debate in itself, since Dionne Brand is not Vietnamese Canadian. Based on its content, however, one could classify the text as “Vietnamese Canadian” literature.

belonging. The few publications on *WWALF* focus on Brand's treatment of Canada as a (white) political state, and on how the second- (and to a lesser extent, first-) generation characters deal with racism and maintain hope. This thesis, while extending such lines of discussion on Canadian racism, also contributes to existing criticism by comparing and contrasting the two generations' approaches to "home" and family. *Certainty*, which was recently published in 2006, has not yet received scholarly attention. The most important contribution of this thesis is its proposal of intergenerational inheritance in diasporic families. None of the criticism on either text alludes to this idea of the transmission of the past.

The Vu family in *WWALF* belongs to the Vietnamese diaspora of the mid to late 1970s that was triggered by the civil war between the communist North and anti-communist South. *Certainty* gives an account of multiple displacements – communal, familial, and personal – due to war and colonialism. Part of the text is set in Borneo; Matthew and Ani's childhood homeland, during the 1940s and 50s. During this period, Borneo underwent intense political change, from a colony of the British and Dutch, to a Japanese occupied territory during World War II, to part of independent Malaysia and Indonesia.

The first-generation characters in both texts gravitate towards the homeland, exhibiting what Steven Vertovec defines as "diaspora consciousness." He observes:

Particularly in works concerning global diasporas (especially within Cultural Studies), there is considerable discussion surrounding a kind of 'diaspora consciousness' marked by dual or multiple identifications. Hence there are depictions of individuals' awareness of decentred attachments, of being simultaneously 'home away from home,' 'here and there' or, for instance, British and something else . . . [T]he majority seem

to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation . . . Further aspects of diasporic consciousness are explored by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, who suggest that whatever their form or trajectory, 'diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and attachment.' (450-51)

In their texts, Brand and Thien stress the first generation's orientation towards a past homeland, an orientation that distinguishes the first generation's consciousness from that of their children.

The second-generation characters in *WWALF* and *Certainty* are born and raised in Canada. Although Tuyen explores her Vietnamese ancestry through art and Gail delves into her father's past by traveling to the colonial homeland, these projects are driven by personal desire rather than homeland desire. The second generation does not exhibit "diaspora consciousness," but more of a "transnational consciousness," a term that this thesis proposes in chapter two. "Transnational" is a more accurate descriptor than "diaspora" for the second generation's consciousness because these characters did not undergo a major dispersion, are not fixated on a lost "homeland," and feel inclined towards transnational movement. The second generation maintains little attachment to any place, opting for a nomadic rather than stable lifestyle. Gail and Wideh in *Certainty* travel the world while Tuyen and her friends in *WWALF* imaginatively transgress geopolitical and ethnocultural "borders." "Diaspora consciousness" and "transnational consciousness" are not mutually exclusive, but there are enough significant differences between them to warrant two separate terms that this thesis applies to the first and second generations respectively.

Chapters one and two discuss the first and second generations' approaches to "home" respectively. In both texts, the first-generation diasporans emigrate to Canada where they attempt to (re)locate "home." Their children also encounter this difficult task despite being locally born. Often, "the meaning of 'home' is much wider than that of 'house'" (Boughey 228). Some authors note that "[t]he concept of 'home' embraces both a physical and a social space; the house itself is home, as are the social relations contained within it" (Munro and Madigan 107). For the purposes of this thesis, "home" – physical dwelling, city, and world at large – denotes the site and the situation(s) within that site. The opening two chapters investigate various meanings of "home" in great detail.

For diasporic communities, concepts of "home" are entangled with the originary homeland and with nostalgic longings for return there, even among diasporic subjects who have never actually lived in the homeland. Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld insist that

[d]iaspora literature is an excellent starting point for analyzing different experiences of return . . . Even if the homeland exists only in memory, the idea of return is critical for many dispersed communities, and it extends beyond those who personally remember the home country. A homeland has meaning even when people are ambivalent about it rather than identifying with a particular place, or when the diaspora in question, such as the Afro-Caribbean, does not have a single center. (5)

Long and Oxfeld allude to the salience of the homeland for diasporans as well as for their children, those who do not "personally remember." Chapter three addresses the twin themes of family and kinship networks, which are bound up with the concept of "home," and concludes with a discussion on intergenerational inheritance. The second generation

inherits some of its predecessor's past and longings in a complex and often conflicted way. Aptly enough, the titles of the texts respond well to each other. Diasporans and their children long for a "home" in which they can feel certain about themselves; however, Brand and Thien present "home" as highly uncertain.

## Chapter 1: The First Generation's Approaches to "Home"

The first-generation Asian Canadian characters in Brand's *WWALF* and Thien's *Certainty* belong to the Vietnamese and Malaysian diasporas respectively. Although the conditions that induced these two dispersions are different, the characters' approaches to "home" are strikingly similar. In both texts, after the first-generation characters emigrate from the home country, they settle in the host country (or countries) where they attempt to (re)locate "home." The (re)location of "home" is a laborious process that continues over many years, perhaps even a lifetime, rather than a completed project.

Etymologically, the word "home" derives from the Old Low German word "heim" meaning "home" and the Old English word "ham" meaning "house, abode, native place, one's own place or country." In contemporary vernacular, the word "home" is usually interpreted as a place – dwelling-house, native land, or district of birth – where one lives (especially with family) and to which one feels attachment (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Brand and Thien interrogate the concept of "home" in their texts, offering more nuanced and counter-intuitive conceptualizations of it via the first immigrant generation's experiences.

A great deal of the literature on global diasporas emphasizes their "catastrophic origins" (Cohen, *Global Diasporas* 1). William Safran takes the Jewish diaspora, the "ideal type" (84), as his point of departure in exploring other diasporas such as the Armenian one, which is partly based on "a remembrance of betrayal, persecution, and genocide" (84). Robin Cohen stresses how "dispersal from an original centre is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of

the great historic injustice that binds the group together” (*Global Diasporas* 23). For the first-generation characters in *WWALF* and *Certainty*, war and loss coalesce to effect a traumatic moment of dispersal.

The Vietnamese dispersion featured in *WWALF* was motivated by a civil war between the communist North and the anti-communist South that began in 1959 and officially ended in April 1975 when North communist forces seized Saigon.<sup>3</sup> Although the communist regime forbade people to leave the country, people fled (often during the night) via overcrowded boats. Hence, Vietnamese refugees are often referred to as “boat people.” Tuan and Cam Vu, the husband and wife first-generation characters in *WWALF*, embark on this dangerous escape with their three children. During the rush, however, they lose their youngest child, Quy. Ironically, his name means “precious.” Compounding this irony is the fact that Cam had sewn precious stones, diamonds, into the seams of Quy’s pants (7) so that their family would have some assets upon their arrival in Canada.<sup>4</sup> In this episode, Brand demonstrates how diaspora always entails loss. Diasporans may lose tangible assets such as their houses and vehicles; however, more abstract possessions vanish as well. In this case, loss is viscerally figured in a beloved son. Tuan and Cam are not afforded any closure either because Quy’s status – dead or alive – after his separation from them remains unknown, even after they spend many years searching for him.

---

<sup>3</sup> In 1954, an international conference in Geneva sanctioned Vietnam’s independence from French colonial rule. Vietnam was divided into two states: the communist North and the anti-communist South (supported by the Americans). See *The Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese in Canada*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> This was a common practice among Vietnamese boat people. Families converted their life savings into gold or precious stones that could be traded later.

Similarly, war and loss constitute trauma for Matthew, one of the diasporans in *Certainty*. The Japanese invade his hometown of Sandakan, British North Borneo (present-day Malaysia) in 1942 and occupy it for the following three years. Matthew's father, a Sandakan government official, collaborates with the Japanese to acquire extra food and money for his family during the occupation. Matthew, less than ten years old at the time, lives in constant fear: "Each night he woke to the sound of army trucks rumbling past. He knew the Japanese police, the *kempeitai*, came after curfew, sweeping the huts for guerillas and taking away any person, any family, they suspected" (33-34). Matthew's fears become reality when the Japanese execute his father shortly before the British regain power. Matthew bears witness to his father's murder, goes into shock for a few days, and is traumatized for life. When he is older, Matthew tells his wife that "the war was a rift, a scar" (128). Scars are permanent bodily disfigurements; likewise, the war wounds Matthew psychologically and its damaging effects are imprinted on him for life.

In addition to losing his father, Matthew loses his first love, Ani. A few days after his father is killed, Matthew and his mother leave Sandakan. He returns alone at the age of eighteen and reunites with Ani. Despite their intense love and the child they conceive, Ani ends their relationship because "the love that she felt for him could not be separated from the childhood they shared" (173-74). For her, their love is anachronistic and therefore, cannot be pursued. At the time, Matthew is unaware of Ani's pregnancy and thus, he (unknowingly) loses a son. His ignorance of this loss does not invalidate it as a traumatic event, but demonstrates how diasporans may be unaware of the full extent of

their loss. In fact, Ani reveals their son's existence many years later because "[t]hey [Matthew and Ani] both had to have the truth between them, to understand what had been lost, to know how to go forward" (265). This episode in *Certainty* resembles Tuan and Cam's loss of Quy in *WWALF*. It is also significant that Matthew, Tuan, and Cam adhere to Confucian values, so losing the first male child is perhaps the most devastating loss possible.

Ani also experiences traumatic loss. After she ends her relationship with Matthew, "she imagine[s] the tide sliding under her, pulling her away from Sandakan, this life and the pain" (175). Ani eventually leaves Sandakan and years later, tells her husband that "a part of herself still lived and breathed in Sandakan" (243). It is significant that Ani does not figuratively take Sandakan with her; instead, a piece of Ani remains in Sandakan. This quotation evokes a sense of loss because Ani implies that she is no longer a complete person if a part of her remains elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

For Matthew and Ani, departure from Sandakan is motivated by war and its attendant tragedies of death and heartbreak. However, Thien does not limit the cause of diaspora to war, though she maintains the correlation between diaspora and trauma. Clara, Matthew's wife, emigrates due to seemingly benign circumstances. However, her emigration from Kowloon, Hong Kong to Australia is entangled with trauma. Her decision to emigrate is triggered by her bearing witness to a death. She helplessly watches a boy fall from the roof of a building while flying his kite. The narrator states that "she [Clara] was twelve years old the day, the moment, the city became altered to

---

<sup>5</sup> In poststructuralist theory, one's identity is never "complete." However, this chapter is more interested in the ideas of loss that emerge in this quotation.

her” (121). The night of the accident, she realizes that “for the first time in her life, she wanted to be anywhere but where she stood” (124). This example illustrates personal displacement as Clara’s family remains in Hong Kong after she travels to Australia for university and then to Canada with Matthew. Her trauma differs from that of Matthew and Ani, but some form of trauma appears necessary to initiate displacement.

In contrast to her husband, Clara desires emigration. As a young girl, she was inclined towards travel as she immersed herself in novels such as *Journey to the West* and *A Tale of Two Cities* (120). When Clara leaves Hong Kong to pursue a university degree in Australia, she changes her name:

On that day [that she was accepted into university overseas], she gave herself an English name, as many young women were choosing to do, on their departure from Hong Kong. Leung Ching Yun, Clearest Spring, the name of her childhood slipped away from her, into the past. She wrote her new name out in the letter she sent to the University of Melbourne. *Clara Leung*. (125)

“Clara” means “clear,” so there is still a connection to her old name and identity.

However, she pronounces a modified identity through the act of altering her name linguistically and phonemically. Thien demonstrates how emigration changes a person to some degree, but not entirely. Clara does not cling to her past by maintaining a relic of it – her Chinese name – but invests in future possibilities. For her, opportunity partly motivates emigration.

Diaspora is intimately entangled with trauma, which is partly constituted by loss. The ultimate loss for diasporans collectively is the homeland. Scholars state that members of a diaspora “retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements” and that “they regard their

ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate” (Safran 89-90; see also Cohen 26 and Clifford 305). As Safran argues, however, return is a myth: “Some diasporas persist—and their members do not go “home”—because there is no homeland to which to return; because, although a homeland may exist, it is not a welcoming place with which they can identify politically, ideologically, or socially; or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora” (98). This poignant theme – the desire, yet impossibility of returning to the homeland – appears in *WWALF* and *Certainty*. In both texts, the homeland is an imaginary place premised on the past.

To the annoyance of their Canadian-born children, Tuan and Cam in *WWALF* constantly express their nostalgia over Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> The diasporic parents bore their children with speeches about “how life used to be ‘back home,’ [using] . . . inspired descriptions of other houses, other landscapes, other skies, other trees” (20). The repetition of “other” in this quotation underscores the spatial and psychological remoteness of the homeland. Traditionally, the huge geographical distance between the home and host countries posed an obstacle to one’s return. However, physical return is more of a reality now due to modern technology such as the airplane. Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld propose three different types of return for diaspora communities: imagined, provisional, and repatriated (7-13). Tuan and Cam can only participate in an

---

<sup>6</sup> The word “nostalgia” is derived from the Greek words *nostos* (to return home) and *algia* (a painful feeling). From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, nostalgia – homesickness – was treated as a debilitating medical condition. See Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer’s “Generations of Nostalgia,” 257-58.

imagined return. The pre-Civil War Vietnam that they want is inaccessible because it has changed over time. It has literally become an “other” – another – Vietnam. Despite the ethnic, cultural, and economic heterogeneity of pre-Civil War Vietnam, “overseas Vietnamese frequently attempt to create a standardised and consistent image of Vietnam for their own purposes” (Thomas np). Tuan and Cam’s stable and romantic notions of pre-Civil War Vietnam help them cope with the rapid and overwhelming changes that characterize their new life in Canada.

Even years after settling in Canada, the couple decides against returning to Vietnam to search for their missing son. Instead, their Canadian-born son, Binh, takes on this task. His younger sister Tuyen, also Canadian-born, is opposed to his decision, wary that his failure to find Quy will devastate their parents. She asks him, “Why didn’t they [Tuan and Cam] go looking for themselves? Long ago then?” to which he replies, “They couldn’t leave here [Canada] . . . they were scared . . . They were refugees” (156; original ellipses). Binh invokes his parents’ status as refugees in order to justify their need for his assistance. The legal definition of refugee status was conceived at the 1951 *Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. The most universally cited section of the definition states:

[T]he term “refugee” shall apply to any person who[,] . . . owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (qtd. in UNHCR “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees” 16)

The word “fear” punctuates this definition. So, although Binh does not state exactly what his parents feared, the definition above illuminates Tuan and Cam’s situation: they were afraid of returning to a country that had turned foreign and would likely persecute them. As refugees, Tuan and Cam could not return to Vietnam.

In *Certainty*, Matthew maintains a similar sentiment towards his homeland of Sandakan. Like Tuan and Cam, he imagines his homeland as a utopia, mainly because of its association with Ani. Unlike Tuan and Cam, Matthew actually returns when he is eighteen years old. He tells Clara about his childhood with “fatigue in his voice” (127). For Matthew, meditating on a past life that offered so much possibility but produced so much pain is emotionally exhausting. He confesses: “Sandakan was all that I had known. Everything I loved was there. The year I turned eighteen, I went back by myself . . . I came to see that there was no place for me there, that what I wanted had disappeared long ago” (127). The trip revealed to Matthew that the imagined utopia he wanted was gone.

Similar to Matthew, Ani voices an intense desire for the old Sandakan. She tells Matthew: “In my imagination you had found a way into Sandakan, the way it once was. When the adults around me spoke of an afterlife, of wandering souls, this was the place I imagined. Not something in the future, but something known from before. A place that I, myself, had once seen” (155). In reality, however, the old Sandakan is irrecoverable. After all, Matthew can only enter the city in Ani’s imagination. Social scientific research indicates that “this desire to be linked in dreams with a former homeland is a common experience of displaced people” (Thomas np). However, outside of the realm of dreams, reveries, and imagination, Sandakan had become a palimpsest in which “new buildings

[began] to rise from the ground . . . [yet Matthew and Ani were] unable to forget what had lain there before, the rubble and the waste, and even further back, like something imagined, the old town” (156). Stuart Hall believes that such imaginative recovery or “rediscovery” (224) can be a positive force for diasporic communities, who can (re)imagine their “original” culture, geography, and history. He discusses Africa as a homeland, an imaginary place that undergoes continual construction “as we re-tell it through politics, memory and desire” (232).<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Matthew and Ani erect their Sandakan through imaginative investment.

In *WWALF*, Tuan and Cam’s lost son becomes a symbol of their lost past. Their sadness over these losses manifests itself in insomnia. Tuyen notes that “her mother and father had stopped sleeping in the same room when they moved to Richmond Hill. What with her mother’s insomnia and her father’s equal sleeplessness, their schedules of paltry intermittent sleep did not coincide. So as not to disturb each other, or as Tuyen suspected, so as not to have to talk to each other, to go over the worn language of disappointment, they each had a separate room” (60). The past pervades their lives in Canada and denies them basic sleep, the source of dream. However, Tuan’s and Cam’s insomnia differ. Hers “was not a restful one . . . but a continuous pacing, throughout which she went over again and again the scene at the bay when they had both lost sight of Quy” (113). She repeatedly conjures up these disturbing memories, “play[ing] the vision over in her head, trying to regain the moment when she did not see, trying to alter the sequence of events

---

<sup>7</sup> Robin Cohen suggests that diasporans are not only concerned with the “‘maintenance or restoration’ of a homeland [as William Safran proposes], but also its very creation . . . [as] an ‘imagined homeland’ that only resembles the original history and geography of the diaspora’s natality in the remotest way” (*Global Diasporas* 23).

so that she would arrive at herself in the present with her family and her mind intact. Just a split second would have been all the difference . . . Why couldn't she reclaim the time?" (113). Cam approaches Quy's loss in a highly active manner. She deals with guilt by re-imagining the events surrounding his disappearance so that the outcome is positive. The utility of this coping mechanism is limited, however, since one's imagination is only a temporary avenue of escape.<sup>8</sup> She must live with her son's loss in the present moment. Cathy Caruth, a trauma theorist, argues in *Unclaimed Experience* that trauma survivors re-experience the traumatic moment repeatedly. Indeed, Cam relives that night on the bay when she is severed from her child and homeland.

Tuan also feels extreme guilt over having lost his son. Unlike Cam, however, he draws during his bouts of insomnia. He practiced as a civil engineer in Vietnam and after settling in Canada, "drew buildings as if he was still what he was" (114). In fact, he becomes fixated on drawing:

In his spare time, which was brief, after the [family-owned] restaurant was shut for the night . . . Tuan would go home and draw. Because after all that work he couldn't sleep. He had gone past tired to that wide-awake state that prevented him from sleeping until three or four in the morning. Tuan would often begin working on his drawings at one of the tables in the restaurant, not bothering to go home when the rest of his family left. (113)

Tuan copes with his loss of pre-Civil War Vietnam by drafting buildings, potential "homes." It is significant that he continues to draw rather than go home with his family at the end of the work day. He seems more comfortable creating homes on paper than returning to his own home that is devoid of a beloved lost son.

---

<sup>8</sup> The same could be said of Stuart Hall's endorsement of (re)imagining the homeland. However, his approach demands a communal effort. In contrast, Cam's re-imagining of that night on the bay occurs in isolation. She has nobody to turn to for support, not even Tuan, who finds his own ways to cope with the loss of Quy.

Tuan's detail-oriented mind made him "only too aware of how important it was to have the right weight of objects, the correct angle of alignment for a stable structure. So too with events . . . he had not been able to somehow measure the danger [that night on the bay], to apprehend the most crucial moment [of losing his son] like the weakest point in a structure" (114). Tuan incongruously applies his knowledge of civil engineering to reality. He fails to recognize that one cannot exert control over life the way one can over physical structures. He obsessively drafts the perfect "home" structure on paper because he cannot attain such a "home" in reality. This displacement of grief over the loss of Quy onto drafting projects provides momentary relief.

In addition to drawing, Tuan copes with the loss of his son by maintaining excessive control over his household. His mentality is to "*Guard the home you have, and regret vanishes* . . . *Keep the order of the household* . . . The household was strictly committed to these mantras. But, still, neither of them, Cam nor Tuan, could find a cure for their alertness" (114). The couple's "alertness" – insomnia – is a manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder. Their creative attempts to relieve their guilt are unsuccessful.

Matthew in *Certainty* and Tuan and Cam in *WWALF* succumb to their devastating losses, exhibiting what Sigmund Freud calls "melancholia." Freud differentiates mourning and melancholia: "[M]ourning' is a healthy response to loss; it is finite in character and accepts substitution . . . 'Melancholia' on the other hand, is pathological; it is interminable in nature and refuses substitution" (Cheng 7-8). In both texts, the loss of

the homeland torments the first-generation characters, who cannot mourn but only melancholically grieve.

In *Certainty*, Matthew's inability to reconcile the loss of his childhood home renders him psychospatially displaced. That is, he harbours an emotional anxiety and a physical discomfort with his place in the world. Matthew's psychospatial displacement is best exemplified in his reaction to residence in Canada. After moving to Vancouver with Clara, Matthew "could not sleep, and began to disappear from the house at night. When he came home, exhausted, ill, he said that he wanted to return to Australia [where he had completed his university studies], to Malaysia [where he had spent his childhood] . . . he had been mistaken, he said, to believe he could start over" (134). Matthew feels displaced on two planes: a psychic, emotional one as manifested in his lack of sleep and a spatial, physical one as manifested in his tendency to wander from the house. Ironically, Matthew returns to his Vancouver "home" that does not provide him with any comfort after his nightly wanderings. Although he has settled in Canada, he feels extremely unsettled.

Brand aligns the loss of the homeland with that of the child in *WWALF*. Quy's loss casts a melancholic shadow over his parents, who become metaphorically paralyzed. Tuan admits that "he did not like to think of that moment [when they lost Quy] the way Cam did—if he did, he would have days of paralysis when he could not get out of his pyjamas, his limbs felt weak, and he could not work" (114). These physical symptoms testify to the severity of his grief. He dislikes harbouring such negative feelings, but cannot transcend them. Cam spends a great deal of her time lying in bed with the lights dimmed (60). She too suffers from debilitating grief. An exasperated Tuyen insists that

“they [Tuan and Cam] need to forget it [Quy's loss]. Not forget, but make peace with it” (156). The manner in which Tuan and Cam engage with their memories of Quy is detrimental to their psychological health. Guilt and remorse inform their remembering and Tuyen correctly recognizes that this must change.

Traumatic loss is integral to diaspora; however, a melancholic attitude towards loss inflicts greater pain on the diasporan and negatively affects those around him. In *WWALF*, Quy's loss hurts Tuan and Cam in addition to all of their other children, some of whom were born after Quy. Binh bitterly states that Quy, “not having to do anything, never failed at anything. And who, not having a physical presence, could never be scrutinized for flaws and mistakes. That mythic brother grew in perfection” (122). In *Certainty*, Matthew “wish[es] to go back” (167) to his childhood, but this is impossible. He cannot travel back in time to reclaim what he has lost. He eventually concludes that “going back [to Sandakan] only opened up the memory, but there was no solace. I only saw the terrible waste of it, the things I couldn't change” (128). His perpetual sadness almost destroys his marriage with Clara. These first-generation characters in both texts continue to struggle with past loss upon their arrival in the host country (or countries).

Brand and Thien portray the various difficulties that diasporans experience upon their arrival in the host country (or countries). Scholars claim that one common feature of a dispersed community is their “troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance” (Cohen 26; see also Safran 89). Thus, it is very challenging to establish a new “home” in the host country. “Home” and (externally or self-imposed) alienation are incompatible. Brand and Thien present diasporic approaches to “home” in

the host country (or countries) differently. Brand explores Canadian multiculturalism and race relations in *WWALF* while Thien concentrates more on transnational and global conceptualizations of “home” rather than a single “host country” in *Certainty*.

In *WWALF*, Tuan and Cam flee communist Vietnam to establish a better life for their family in Canada, but still long for their homeland. Khanh Vo, a Vietnamese American artist, synthesizes these ideas:

[T]he refugee space is a concept I constructed to explore the displacement experienced by Viet Nameese living in the U.S. It speaks of geographic locations and psychological states of mind. Sanctuary is sought . . . [yet] this quest for shelter/safety results in a perception of falseness; every place is a substitution for the original. A fragile existence arises out of this dilemma. It is burdened by memories of the past and endlessly driven in the search for a new space to call “home.” The refugee space is one that sits between hope, disappointment, and loss. (qtd. in Min 229)

Although Vo focuses on the subjectivity of Vietnamese refugees residing in the United States, his concept of the “refugee space” also applies to those residing in Canada.

Indeed, Tuan and Cam are initially hopeful about life in Canada. They upgrade from a one bedroom accommodation in downtown Toronto to “a giant house in Richmond Hill, where rich immigrants live in giant houses” (54). Here, Brand alludes to the “monster home” phenomenon of the mid to late 1980s that was occurring in Vancouver (and some Toronto suburbs, though it did not receive as much media attention).<sup>9</sup>

Brand elaborates on the area in which Tuan and Cam settle: “Richmond Hill is a sprawling suburb where immigrants go to get away from other immigrants, but of course

---

<sup>9</sup> Some Chinese immigrants began to purchase large and expensive mansion-style homes – “monster homes” – and were blamed for the rapid increase in local housing prices. According to sociologists, the increase in housing prices presented an opportunity for white residents to openly express hostility towards their middle- to upper-class Chinese Canadian neighbours. The debacle pertained more to race relations than real estate. See “Contexts of interpretation: Assessing immigrant reception in Richmond, Canada,” 477.

they end up living with all the other immigrants running away from themselves—or at least running away from the self they think is helpless, weak, unsuitable” (55). Ironically, after fleeing Vietnam, Tuan and Cam continue to flee from other immigrants within Canada. For them, dispersion is a protracted process. However, their reasons for dispersion are now informed by (white) hegemonic ideals. Immigrants like Tuan and Cam “hate that self that keeps drawing attention, the one that can’t fit in because of colour or language, or both, and they think that moving to a suburb will somehow eradicate that person once and for all” (55). So, Tuan and Cam’s house becomes a failed refuge from themselves. It is a space fraught with contradictions because they cannot escape themselves, or at least the part of themselves that they have learned to detest. Brand exposes how immigrants like Tuan and Cam may internalize the subdued racism that circulates in Canada, a country that Tuyen sarcastically refers to as “the promised land” (65).

The Vu house functions more as a warehouse than a “home,” a space conventionally meant to provide peace and comfort. Inside of their house, Tuan and Cam “had everything and nothing. They didn’t even like or savour having everything, they simply had it as a matter of course. Cars, cellphones, computers, expensive clothes, unused bicycles, unused toys, unused kitchen gadgets, unused birthday gifts, gifts that only had a momentary charge of excitement that was not excitement but agitation” (62). Although the Vus now “lived beyond all that drama of material poverty” (55) encapsulated in their initial one bedroom accommodation, a sense of emotional poverty due to the loss of Quy persists. Tuan and Cam lost Quy and countless tangible valuables

when they fled Vietnam. As such, they “didn’t throw away anything” (62) once they settled in Canada. They hoard items, literally making their house less empty; however, the abundance of material possessions does not compensate for the loss of Quy.

Tuyen, the most rebellious Vu child, decides to move out and claims: “I’m not leaving you . . . but look, look around here. It’s schizophrenic . . . there’s too much clutter, too many things. I can’t think” (62-63). Sheng-mei Ma investigates the figure of the “immigrant schizophrenic” (43) in Asian diaspora literature and cites R.D. Laing’s observations on schizophrenia:

The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself ‘together with’ others or ‘at home in’ the world, but on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as ‘split’ in various ways, perhaps as a mind or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on. (qtd. in Ma 43)

Ma applies Laing’s definition to “immigrants [who] are constantly separated, in space, from their loved ones and in time, from their memories of the past (self). The present strange world as well as their former existence lay a siege against immigrants in Asian Diaspora literature, resulting in their schizophrenic tendency” (44). Tuan and Cam’s cluttered and “schizophrenic” house is symptomatic of their divided selves that resulted from the loss of their son and homeland. Neither of them can feel “at home” in any setting.

Tuan and Cam’s efforts to stage their house as a home are unsuccessful. For example, “the rooms of their big house in Richmond Hill were stuffed with clumsy

furniture” (62). The couple is more concerned with filling up empty space than with selecting comfortable and aesthetically pleasing pieces. Also, “there was a television in each room, turned on endlessly and loudly” (62) to counter the overwhelming silence that results after Tuan and Cam’s numerous arguments over who is to blame for Quy’s loss (64). Tuan and Cam develop an aversion to various forms of emptiness – psychological, spatial, and auditory – after they lose their son. Their house becomes a site in which they attempt to combat this emptiness.

An eerie climate exists inside of the Vu house. In his 1919 essay, “The Uncanny,” Freud explores the uncanny (*unheimlich*), something that engenders anxiety because it is both familiar and strange.<sup>10</sup> According to Freud, the most striking example of the uncanny is the haunted house. In “The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime,” Anthony Vidler argues that “the house provided an especially favored locus for uncanny disturbances [in some early nineteenth century literature because of its] . . . apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits” (7). Brand employs this discourse of the unhomely house in *WWALF*. For example, “the carpeting in their spacious house had a path of plastic running over regularly traveled surfaces. And the chairs and couches were not only Scotchgarded but covered in protective plastic that made sitting the most uncomfortable act” (63). The house alienates its inhabitants. Joe Moran argues that any “lived-in house blends into the background, moulds itself seamlessly around our bodies,

---

<sup>10</sup> Recall that the word “home” derives from the German word “heim.” “Unheimlich,” the word that Freud uses for “uncanny,” literally means “unhomely.”

gestures, activities and thoughts. These cumulative remnants of habitual experience [such as] . . . the indentations of bodies on upholstery, the wear and tear of well-trodden carpets and stairs . . . point to a notion of memory as ‘a sort of anti-museum’” (39). The Vus’ Richmond Hill house resembles a haunted house or a mausoleum in which Quy’s absent presence dominates. Cam keeps copies of her letters to Vietnamese officials and organizations in which she pleads for assistance in locating her son. Tuyen discovers her mother’s huge cache of letters and “held them like ornate and curious figures of a time past” (25). In addition, chilling photographs of Quy “looked at her [Tuyen] from every mantel, every surface” (267). The house’s disconcerting devotion to the past – Quy – renders it an unhomely place.

Beyond the walls of Tuan and Cam’s house exists Toronto, which has been called “one of the most liveable and multicultural urban places in the world today” (*City of Toronto* np). Fifty percent of Toronto’s current population was born outside of Canada and Brand highlights the city’s ethnocultural diversity throughout the text. Toronto functions as a metonym for multicultural Canada because one could “name a region on the planet and there’s someone from there, here [in Toronto]” (4). However, she writes against the notion that Toronto, or Canada more generally, is a “liveable” place, especially for non-white immigrants like Tuan and Cam. In fact, Canada is an uncanny place, superficially welcoming yet fundamentally alienating. Modern conceptualizations of Freud’s uncanny incorporate ideas of alienation, estrangement, and homelessness (Masschelein 64). Himani Bannerji states that

‘Canada’ . . . cannot be taken as a given. It is obviously a construction, a set of representations, embodying certain types of political and cultural

communities and their operations. These communities were themselves constructed in agreement with certain ideas regarding skin colour, history, language (English/French), and other cultural signifiers . . . which may be subsumed under the ideological category 'White.' (290)

Tuan and Cam grapple with establishing “home” in such an unwelcoming place.

Upon their arrival in Canada, authorities do not ratify Tuan and Cam's professional documents. So, despite their high education, Tuan and Cam become menial “worker[s] in the immigrant sweatshop they call this city” (212). Cam becomes a manicurist although she knows nothing about the profession: “this after being in practice in Saigon for seven years as a family doctor” (66). Tuan works in Chinatown where his “engineering came in handy at calibrating the weight of crates and boxes on his shoulders and back” (66). Brand's sardonic tone makes evident her frustration over Canada's denial of foreign accreditation and its tendency to relegate highly skilled immigrants to low-paying employment sectors. Bannerji would agree, for she states that “by locking immigrant workers into zones of menial labour and low wages, the state has . . . actively de-skilled and marginalized Third World immigrants by decertifying them and forcing them into the working class” (294). For immigrants, regaining accreditation in Canada is extremely difficult, but legally possible. Most, however, do not have the time or money. Tuan and Cam eventually purchase a restaurant and

after that, there was no more thought of being a civil engineer any more, or a doctor. Tuan knew he would never be allowed to build buildings. Cam was more hopeful . . . [but] her English proficiency failed her. Never mind that she was probably only going to take care of Vietnamese patients who couldn't understand English-speaking doctors anyway; never mind that she could turn a breach,<sup>11</sup> never mind. She too gave up finally. (66)

---

<sup>11</sup> A medical term referring to a fetus that is positioned sideways.

This quotation demonstrates how Vo's concept of the "refugee space" – a site of hope, disappointment, and loss – changes over time for Tuan and Cam. They eventually relinquish any hope regarding employment. Originally, they had "come [to Toronto] thinking that they would be who they were, or at least who they had managed to remain. After the loss of Quy, it made a resigned sense to them that they would lose other parts of themselves. Once they accepted that, it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food" (66-67).

The city of Toronto exercises power over Tuan and Cam. They "were being defined by the city" (66) as restaurant owners, a stereotypical job for Southeast Asian immigrants. This line of work is unsuitable for Tuan and Cam because they cannot cook well, but "eager Anglos ready to taste the fare of their multicultural city wouldn't know the difference" (67). Here, Brand mocks Canadian multiculturalism, a policy that embraces immigrants insofar as they express their culture in ways such as food, music, clothing, and dance. Canadian multiculturalism is less likely to accommodate for immigrants regarding weightier issues that would grant them access to state power. In fact, "there is little in the state's notion of multiculturalism that speaks to social justice" (Bannerji 296). According to Eva Mackey, official "[m]ulticulturalism' was developed as a mode of managing internal differences within the nation" (50). Canada contains Tuan and Cam's "Vietnameseness" within the unthreatening domain of food.

The Vu family's restaurant, Saigon Pearl, functions as more of a "home" than Toronto and/or their house in Richmond Hill. Tuan and Cam spend most of their time at the restaurant preparing food and attending to customers. In fact, "the restaurant became

their life” (66). The restaurant’s busy environment (68) distracts Tuan and Cam from thinking about Quy. They simply do not have time to lament over his loss while working. The Saigon Pearl is an unorthodox “home” because work is not usually associated with relaxation, a luxury that the traditional “home” provides. However, in order for Tuan and Cam to relax, they must be working so that they do not think about the moment they lost their son.

Loss frightens Tuan and Cam to the extent that they take all measures to avoid experiencing it again. Cam laminates “birth certificates, identity cards, immigration papers, and citizenship papers and cards. She checked incessantly and duplicated them tenfold, keeping them in cookie jars, vanity drawers, and breadboxes” (63). Her obsessive compulsive behaviour is not uncommon among former refugees, many of whom live without citizenship status for extended periods of time (see Kibrieb). Only citizens are afforded state protection and the prospect of losing this right terrifies people like Cam. This brief scenario in the text gestures to current global problems. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that in 2007, the global refugee population was 9.9 million. Refugees and asylum seekers<sup>12</sup> are vulnerable to abuse because they do not belong to a state that will protect their rights. The UNHCR attempts to protect refugees, but its staff of 6300 people cannot adequately handle all of the world’s cases. This problem raises the question of who must assume responsibility for the rapidly increasing number of refugees. So, despite Canada’s subtle racism, it is a

---

<sup>12</sup> Asylum seekers want to be legally defined as refugees.

much safer place than a refugee camp, for example.<sup>13</sup> Canada is a legal shelter for Tuan and Cam rather than a comfortable “home.”

Toronto is one of the most popular Canadian cities in which immigrants like Tuan and Cam settle. People from over 200 countries, speaking 150 distinct languages currently live in Toronto (*City of Toronto* np). Brand portrays these people as greatly traumatized: “all the lives they’ve hoarded, all the ghosts they’ve carried, all the scars and marks and records for recognition—the whole heterogeneous baggage falls out with each step on the [city’s] pavement. There’s so much spillage” (5). Toronto is overburdened with people’s transplanted pain. It may be an appealing destination because people assume that

it would be easy to disappear here [in Toronto]. Who would know? The man living across the street from you could have fought in the Angolan war, he could’ve killed many people . . . That woman whose ass you love when she walks down the street, she could’ve been tortured in Argentina . . . And the taxi driver you strike up a pleasant conversation with could’ve been her torturer or a torturer of a similar woman in Burma. (310)

Humanitarian aid tends to elide historical, political, and cultural differences between refugee communities, resulting in a “dehistoricizing universalism [that] creates a context in which it is difficult for people in the refugee category to be approached as historical actors rather than simply as mute victims” (Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries” 378). In the above passage, however, Brand writes against this homogenizing discourse by underscoring the myriad of refugee stories that exist in Toronto. The Vu family’s story is just one among many in the city.

---

<sup>13</sup> Limited resources, lack of sanitation, and crime are just some of the problems on refugee camps.

In Toronto, Tuan and Cam have “the seaweed of other shores wrapped around [them]” (20). Brand figures an ethereal Vietnamese “essence” in the native species of seaweed. In fact, various “essences” appear throughout Toronto: “there are Italian neighbourhoods and Vietnamese neighbourhoods in this city; there are Chinese ones and Ukranian ones and Pakistani ones and Korean ones and African ones” (4). Immigrants from across the globe comprise Toronto’s ethnocultural landscape. Some Vietnamese boat people like Tuan and Cam subscribe to the idea that “in living abroad they [could] save their culture, while under the communist regime of Vietnam, their traditional values [were] in danger of being destroyed” (Thomas np). Dispersion, which is often facilely blamed for cultural dilution, is actually the means by which a culture is maintained according to some dispersed populations.

The maintenance (and enrichment) of culture occurs within what Cohen calls “liquid homes”: “ethnic groups can be thought of as having lost their conventional territorial reference points, to have become in effect mobile and multi-located cultures within virtual or uncertain homes” (“Solid, ductile, and liquid” 10). Cohen references Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, which proposes an excellent example of a liquid home that resulted from the African diaspora: “As ideas, people and popular culture crisscrossed between Africa, the Americas and Europe, a deterritorialized diaspora and a fluid idea of home [figured as the black Atlantic Ocean] have emerged” (“Solid, ductile, and liquid” 11). Brand extends this concept of liquid homes to the various ethnocultural communities in Toronto. Since the outbreak of the Vietnamese Civil War, Vietnamese people have been settling all over the world (see Chan and Dorais, and Dorais for detailed

statistics). A testament to the large number of Vietnamese people living abroad is the native term *Việt Kiều*, or “overseas Vietnamese.” Mandy Thomas’s field work on Vietnamese Australians suggests that “thoughts of Vietnam are anchored in the confluence of anti-communist and [Southern] nationalist values. For many, these twin themes form the basis of a connectedness with other diasporic Vietnamese who suffered in, and escaped from, Vietnam” (np). *Việt Kiều* share a common past of communist oppression that induced their emigration to various countries worldwide.<sup>14</sup> The nebulous *Việt Kiều* culture forms the basis of a Vietnamese liquid home that has one satellite location in Toronto.

Within Toronto, various diaspora communities inevitably interact. In *WWALF*, Brand modifies Canada’s “cultural mosaic” in which each cultural community is clearly demarcated from others. Instead, she blurs boundaries: “In this city there are . . . Tamil cooks in Thai restaurants, Calabrese boys with Jamaican accents . . . Filipina-Saudi beauticians” (5). This quotation resonates with the themes of plurality and hybridity (the *hyphenated* Filipina-Saudi beauticians). However, some scholars identify limitations in hybridity theory. For example, Floya Anthias asserts that “hybridization . . . may be seen as a depiction of all culture and therefore neither new nor essentially related to diasporic experience or diasporic space” (622). Anthias’s assessment is valid, but it would not be erroneous to venture that ethnocultural intermingling occurs with greater frequency in a diasporic context. Diaspora presupposes the involvement of a huge number of people.

---

<sup>14</sup> A common Vietnamese expression after communist rule came into effect was “If a lamppost could leave, it would.”

Therefore, a setting such as Toronto, which accommodates hundreds of thousands of diasporans, is fertile ground for hybridization to occur.

Toronto's diasporans "are used to the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop—and if that means they must pretend to know nothing, well, that's the sacrifice they make" (4). The exchange rate to avoid the "shifting" that is associated with dispersion is extremely high. Tuan and Cam allow themselves to be absorbed into Canada's multicultural mosaic, an act that pigeonholes them into menial employment sectors. For Tuan and Cam, assuming a self-deprecating façade of ignorance is worth the stability that Canada offers.

The first-generation characters in *Certainty* also experience this "shifting" sensation that Brand mentions. In particular, Matthew's and Ani's lives are governed by "shifting" because they do not truly settle anywhere following migration from Sandakan. Ani and her husband, Sipke, become transnational citizens while Matthew feels uneasy upon settling in Vancouver with Clara.

Thien does not indict Canadian multiculturalism as harshly as Brand does, but *Certainty* contains brief passages that allude to the glass ceilings non-white immigrants encounter in Canada. For example, despite their University of Melbourne degrees, Clara and Matthew cannot obtain employment in Vancouver: "She could find no work as a schoolteacher and so started her own business as a seamstress . . . A year passed. Still Matthew was out of work. To meet their mortgage payments, he took a job in a restaurant. Eventually, he apprenticed as a cook" (133). This episode resembles Tuan's and Cam's struggles to find employment in Toronto. Both couples are assigned low-

paying and stereotypical Southeast Asian jobs. *WWALF* and *Certainty* demonstrate how it is irrelevant where non-white immigrants obtain their education. They could have been trained in Vietnam, a third world country, or Australia, a first world continent. Ultimately, their non-white immigrant status denies them access to high-paying employment sectors.

Like Tuan and Cam, Matthew experiences insomnia. After the birth of his daughter, Gail, he “began to withdraw into himself, sleeping less or not at all” (133). Matthew’s sudden insomnia is likely the result of a combination of factors. Firstly, Gail’s birth marks the beginning of his life as a father. This newfound responsibility is incongruous with his unrelenting desire to recover a lost past with Ani. Secondly, the prospect of fatherhood, especially for someone who lost his own father at such a young age, is overwhelming. Matthew reflects upon himself, how he “was twenty-eight years old, the same age his father had been when he died” (134). The birth of Matthew’s child coupled with the haunting death of his own father is deeply disturbing. It is ironic that Gail, who should form the nucleus of Matthew and Clara’s new “home” in Vancouver, initially fails to perform this function. Finally, Matthew’s insomnia results directly from living in Vancouver. He admits to Clara that he “had underestimated how different this country would be” (134).

Canada sharply contrasts Matthew’s idyllic vision of Sandakan. After the snow melts in Vancouver, Matthew and Clara see “a poverty around them that they had not expected. Two blocks down, people lived in cardboard boxes. There were prostitutes in back alleys, needles hidden in the grass” (133). This seedy description of Vancouver’s

Downtown Eastside amplifies the differences between the homeland (as Matthew remembers it) and the host country (that never becomes a “home” for him). His positive memories of Sandakan involve the forest paths he and Ani frequented. This serene rural setting<sup>15</sup> is much more comforting than the harsh urban landscape in which he and Clara settle. In fact, Vancouver is an uncanny – both familiar and strange, and therefore alienating – place for Matthew. When he strolls through his neighbourhood, “he loses track of the streets . . . his sense of direction has become confused. When he looks around, nothing he sees is familiar. He has lived here for most of his life, but if he picked up a pencil, out of the small islands of memory he could draw the streets of his childhood, the town of Sandakan, Leila Road<sup>16</sup> winding up into the hillside” (19). Matthew cannot relinquish his past, though he tries: “It was possible, if only he were strong enough. He could leave Sandakan, let Ani go, create for himself a different life from the future he had once imagined” (47). Unfortunately, he does not fully succeed. Vancouver can never compare to Sandakan, his beloved homeland.

Matthew and Clara’s Vancouver house is, in some ways, a global space. The couple “used all their savings for the down payment on a home . . . [S]he [Clara] bought books and lined the shelves with them, adding them to the ones they had brought with them from Melbourne and Hong Kong” (133). In addition, a great deal of “their furniture . . . arrive[d] by steamer from Hong Kong” (132). The house’s contents summarize Matthew and Clara’s experiences abroad. The space functions well as a “home” for

---

<sup>15</sup> Sandakan is known as the “Nature City of Malaysian Borneo” because of its jungles and rainforest. See <http://www.sabah.edu.my/itma026/index.php>.

<sup>16</sup> As children, Matthew and Ani often traversed Leila Road, which leads to a jungle (47).

Clara, who is at peace with her surroundings. This is not surprising given her transnational spirit: “From the time of her adolescence . . . she had known she would leave Hong Kong, she would go into the world beyond” (126). However, Matthew is dissimilar from his wife in this respect and as such, is not as comfortable in their house, a transnational junction.

Ani maintains a transnational approach to “home,” even after her traumatic departure from Sandakan. Similar to Matthew, she wanders from place to place; similar to Clara, she does so more out of personal desire than necessity. Ani remains in Sandakan after the British regain power and witnesses her beloved homeland change: “In the new Sandakan, steamers round the northern tip of Borneo, and new roads link the coast to the interior towns. Commercial flights land at the aerodrome, lifting off to Kota Kinabalu, to Singapore and Hong Kong” (151). She reflects on a process of globalization, facilitated by various means of transportation. Ani accepts this shift from the old Sandakan to its new, internationally-connected rendition without the protest that Matthew would have expressed.

After Ani ends her relationship with Matthew, she leaves Sandakan because it would constantly remind her of the past. She relocates to Tarakan and lives with some members of her mother's family for a brief period of time. And then, “from there, she had felt the wish to be a part of something greater, to lose herself in the city, and so she had continued to Jakarta” (177), the capital of Indonesia. Ani does not have a pressing reason to leave Tarakan. However, her uncle observes how “all our [Tarakan's] young people now . . . are taking their dreams to the city” (178). At this point in Ani's life, the city is

her ultimate destination because it offers the most possibility. Apparently, “when she left Tarakan, she had in her possession documents attesting to her Indonesian citizenship. She had, in some way, come home [to Jakarta] at last” (178). Similar to Cam in *WWALF*, Ani values official citizenship, an essential element of a national “home.” Although Ani had never been to Jakarta before, she felt as though she had “come home” or returned. This sensation suggests that she is a transnational citizen, willing to accept multiple locations – Sandakan, Tarakan, and now Jakarta – as provisional “homes.” In addition, as the capital of Indonesia, Jakarta offers a stronger sense of (national) belonging than the other cities. The (re)location of home entails securing a sense of belonging.

Jakarta in *Certainty* resembles Toronto in *WWALF*. When Ani moves to Jakarta, she works in a photo development studio. Her boss notes how “people come here [to Jakarta] from all over the world . . . [and that] it’s a good place to begin again” (177). The crowded urban space is attractive to traumatized people because they can blend into the variegated population and effectively distance themselves from their pasts.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Ani moves to Jakarta partly because she wants “to lose herself [or more precisely, a part of herself] in the city” (177). Although she considers the city as “home,” the photo development studio fulfills this role as well: “she is at home in this [photo] studio, protected for a brief while from her memories, from the chaos and uncertainty of Jakarta” (177). Here, Thien portrays a microcosmic “home” that exists within the larger city space. For Ani, “home” operates on multiple dimensions.

---

<sup>17</sup> See page 25 of this thesis regarding the ways that people “disappear” or achieve anonymity in Toronto.

Ani exhibits a “diaspora consciousness” that is “marked by dual or multiple identifications” (Vertovec 450). She and her husband “lived in the nearby city of Groningen [the Netherlands], coming to Ysbrechtum only a decade ago . . . To ease her loneliness, they had traveled frequently, going often to The Hague . . . to Maastricht, then across the border into France . . . Indonesia was a world away . . . But in her mind, it joined all things, a background to all that she saw” (278). Although she identifies or feels attached to multiple locations, Indonesia takes precedence.<sup>18</sup> Despite the freedom and adventure that transnationalism offers, Ani appreciates the sense of cohesiveness that her homeland – Indonesia – lends to her life. She will always compare Indonesia to her current place of abode.

Due to dehistoricization and depoliticization, diaspora and exile have become romanticized in anthropology and literary studies (Malkki, “Refugees and Exile” 514); however, a transnational, “homeless” lifestyle may also be highly problematic. There is little condolence in Ani’s assertion that “in some ways, we [she and Matthew] will always be attached” (243). Her statement gestures loosely to the potential of transnationalism, in which tenuous links are forged between people residing in different locations. The reality of their situation, however, is tragic and confirms that transnationalism usually cannot transcend loss.

If diasporans “maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc qtd. in Vertovec 450), there must be a moment when their consciousness undergoes excessive fragmentation. Thien seems to

---

<sup>18</sup> Indonesia and Malaysia battled over the island of Borneo (the location of Sandakan, Matthew and Ani’s childhood home) from 1962-66.

suggest that there is a point at which diaspora consciousness becomes so extreme that the individual breaks. Matthew is an excellent example. He returns to Sandakan twice, “both times thinking that he could find a reason, a person who could *bind him together*, contain his memories, finally” (47; emphasis added). Matthew’s fragmented self requires mending. In fact, Clara does mend Matthew, symbolized by her mending of his clothing: “All these years, Clara has made most of his clothes. He finds pieces around the house, sleeves opened up on her table, starched collars . . . one pant leg creased over a chair” (19-20). If it were not for Clara, Matthew would figuratively exist as disparate pieces. He does not disintegrate into tiny fragments because she “takes a share of [his] grief” (129) and saves him from drowning in the past (305). One can survive a traumatic past, especially when afforded the love of family members. She worries about her husband, who “all his life . . . has struggled to accept what cannot be changed . . . The thread that would bind the two [would] . . . show him the way forward” (131). Clara attempts to lead Matthew out of his depression. In contrast, Tuan and Cam in *WWALF* cannot turn to each other for support because they suffer from the same past that saps their strength.

In *WWALF* and *Certainty*, the first-generation characters desire, to varying degrees, stability with respect to “home.” Nobody seems to (re)locate “home” in the host country (or countries) that measures up to the original “home.” Diasporans like Tuan, Cam, Matthew, and Ani are destined to a state of psychic “homelessness.” Only Clara seems to offer some hope for the first generation to (re)locate “home” outside of the homeland. The first generation’s collective experiences demonstrate that a diasporan

must engage with (memories of) the homeland in a particular way to avoid descending into melancholia.

.Chapter 2: The Second Generation's Approaches to "Home"

Born and raised in Canada, the second-generation protagonists in *WWALF* and *Certainty* are afforded a sense of stability, something that their parents lost during the process of dispersion. However, Tuyen and her friends in *WWALF* and Gail and Wideh in *Certainty* do not exactly desire stability. Brand and Thien demonstrate how the second generation is much more comfortable than its predecessor with a fluid conceptualization of "home"; however, the idea of "home" is not a given for the second generation, but a continuous negotiation with various spaces: the physical dwelling (apartment or house), the city, and the world at large.

The primary second-generation character in *WWALF* is Tuyen, Tuan and Cam's youngest child. This rebellious artist had always "disliked the house [belonging to her parents] in Richmond Hill. It was artificial. The whole development seemed highly contrived, as if it were made all of cardboard and set down quickly and precariously. Someone's idea of luxury, which was really antiseptic, and for all its cars and spaciousness, it was nevertheless rootless and desolate" (55). Tuyen criticizes her parents' Richmond Hill house because it does not provide them with rootedness, a desire born out of their history as boat people. Although Tuyen herself is more inclined towards rootlessness, she does, to some degree, value rootedness. Thus, her feelings towards "home" in terms of stability/instability are contradictory. In this, Brand partly responds to the title of her text, *What We All Long For*, by demonstrating how longings are paradoxical and susceptible to change. The Richmond Hill house harbours excessive grief

over the loss of Quy and Vietnam, suffocating Tuyen to the point where she moves out at the age of eighteen (22).

Tuyen is the first of her friends to break away from the familial home. During high school, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie – the outsiders of their class – become close friends. However, “none of them took each other home . . . In fact, 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” (47). At this point in their lives, “home” assumes a traditional definition: their parents’ house. Tuyen and her friends consider their homes highly restrictive and therefore, spend little time there. They want to leave, though not necessarily abandon, this “home” for another.

Tuyen establishes a new “home” for herself, which functions as an art studio, on College Street in downtown Toronto. Her parents are angry about her decision to live in a grungy downtown apartment because “that was where they had lived when they first arrived from Vietnam” (55). Her family members discredit her apartment as a “dump” (12) and a “cesspool” (56), but she attempts to disarm them by declaring “It’s *my* shit hole” (56; emphasis added). Tuyen values her personal space and the freedom it affords. Despite the negligent landlord, mice, and unpainted walls, she “didn’t mind [the apartment], anything was better than home” (22). Also, her apartment exists on a higher level “above a cheap clothing store” (23), figuratively occupying the plane of idealism. In this new space, she is at liberty to pursue her dreams – the ones she previously discussed

with her friends – of artistry and lesbianism, for example. Tuyen feels more “at home” in her apartment than her parents do in their Richmond Hill house.

Unlike her parents, she does not attend to the appearance of her “home.” The Richmond Hill house stands as a symbol of Tuan and Cam’s material success, falsely validating the couple’s ability to carve out a new “home” in Canada. Meanwhile, Tuyen’s apartment, while superficially ugly, is deeply personal since it doubles as “an art gallery for her installations” (23). As such, she feels very comfortable in this space.

Carla, Tuyen’s best friend, occupies the adjacent apartment.<sup>19</sup> The first item that she purchases after moving in is a stereo on which she plays the Fugees, Missy Elliot, and Lil’ Kim, popular hip hop artists during the mid 1990s.<sup>20</sup> Hip hop – a mixture of African American, West African, and Jamaican musical traditions – originated in New York City during the 1970s. According to the *Encyclopedia of New York State*, “[p]ressing poverty, political grievances, and a wide mixture of persons of African descent, including Haitians, US-born blacks, Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans, contributed to the distinctive nature of hip hop culture,<sup>21</sup> which allowed inner-city youth to establish individual and neighborhood identities in a competitive, largely nonviolent

---

<sup>19</sup> Carla is the product of an interracial relationship: her mother, Angie, was white and her father, Derek, is black. Angie has two children with Derek, Carla and Jamal, before committing suicide because Derek abandons them. At the time, Carla is five years old and Jamal is a baby. Derek reluctantly claims his children, who live with him and his wife. In her late teens, Carla moves out of her father and stepmother’s house.

<sup>20</sup> “Fugees” is shorthand for “refugees.” This band of two Haitian Americans and one African American incorporated elements of rap, reggae, and soul into their songs. When the Fugees disbanded, they all pursued solo careers. Wyclef Jean and Pras Michel, two of the three Fugees, collaborated and produced the largely popular song, “Ghetto Superstar.” A lyrical section performed by Michel goes: “My rise to the top, floatin on this cream / Who the hell wanna stop me, I hated those who doubt / A million refugees with unlimited warranties / Black Ceaser, datin top divas / Diplomatic legalese, no time for a visa.” The song promotes the (black) refugee’s social mobility from the gritty “ghetto” to superstardom.

<sup>21</sup> Two other elements of hip hop culture include graffiti art and breakdancing (*Encyclopedia of New York State* np).

forum” (np). Similar to these New York City youth, Carla and her friends do not belong to the white hegemony and therefore, struggle to locate a “home” in the city. Carla’s musical tastes indicate her support for and perpetuation of hip hop culture.

For the first few months, Carla sleeps on her apartment floor. In fact, she does not acquire much furniture:

Carla’s place was sparse and grew even more sparse . . . She had a futon and three cushions on her floor, a tiny fridge and stove that came with the rent, her stereo and a small television on a few red-and-blue milk crates, and her bicycle hung on the wall. Her clothes, which she kept to a minimum, were neatly, ascetically, hung in two closets. Her shoes she left in a military row outside her door . . . She was frightened by clutter. (38)

Carla’s bare apartment is symptomatic of her fear of clutter or excess “baggage.”<sup>22</sup> Her complex (family) history instills this mentality. After her mother’s suicide, Carla assumes responsibility for her younger brother. Despite his sister’s guidance, Jamal becomes a troubled teen and is repeatedly incarcerated for petty crimes. She consistently comes to his aid, bailing him out of prison. Jamal is part of the baggage that Carla constantly hauls around. Because she cannot curb her brother’s rebelliousness, which is an embittered reaction against the white hegemony, she attempts to exact order over her own life by precisely arranging her material possessions. Even her shoes are lined up in a “military row” outside of her apartment. The military is an institution that epitomizes order and asceticism, qualities that Carla values. She is compelled to exercise some form of control over her chaotic life.

---

<sup>22</sup> The narrator remarks that “the whole heterogeneous baggage” is visible when Torontonians step off the subway each morning (5).

Her fear of baggage reaches an obsessive degree when she experiences “bouts of cleanliness, which could only be called violent, during which she scrubbed and scrubbed her apartment and threw out perfectly good things like plates and knives” (23). Carla does not want to be weighed down by anything, especially her past. However, her past is inescapable because of her familial attachment to Jamal. As such, she does the next best thing by discarding all unnecessary material items.

In contrast, Tuyen does not exhibit an aversion to clutter despite the state of her parents' Richmond Hill house. In particular, she is unbothered by *meaningful* clutter:

Tuyen's own possessions, her clothes, her pots and dishes and such, were scattered in small piles around the growing *lubaio* [an art project] in her apartment. These, her clothing, her dishes, spewed all over the floor, only hiding smaller sharp-edged constructions of an earlier idea to bring a *hutoung* in miniature, and an idea earlier still for mud terraces and a simultaneous one of ornamental *wenshou*—monsters and lions, horses and fish, phoenixes all magical items—some of which she gave to friends when their abundance threatened to clutter even her sense of space. (24)

Environmental sociologist Paul J. J. Pennartz asserts that “[a]tmosphere manifests itself as a double-sided process: the atmosphere of a room works on an individual, and conversely an individual projects his or her specific mood on the room” (95). This dialectic between a dwelling and its inhabitant(s) accounts for the differences in climate between Tuan and Cam's Richmond Hill house and Tuyen's apartment. Tuyen's clutter differs greatly from that of her parents' house. She is emotionally invested in her various art projects and does not use them as staging props. Thus, her apartment is more of a livable space as opposed to her parents' house.

Tuyen's apartment is primitive, a sharp distinction to the extravagance of her parents' house. In fact, she refers to her apartment as a “cave,” “some early place where

the inhabitants had no signs for decorum, no standards for neatness; where they observed an order that was purely utilitarian” (224). Tuyen’s apartment is highly conducive to creative expression. She remarks that “the *lubaio*, the bits of wood, the photographs, the longings<sup>23</sup> were what she brought to the cave to be handled, and thought about, and made into something she could use to create alternate, unexpected realities, exquisite corpses. That’s what Tuan and Cam were, exquisite corpses” (224). Tuyen makes sense of her parents’ complex history through art. According to her, Tuan and Cam are corpses because they figuratively die after fleeing Vietnam and losing Quy. Tuyen’s “primitive home” fulfills her artistic and psychological needs.

Tuyen and Carla often invite friends to their apartments: In fact, the girls’ “apartments became places of refuge, not just for their immediate circle but for all the people they picked up along the way to their twenties” (23). Various youth pass through the two apartments: “the Graffiti Boys across the alleyway, Tuyen’s friends from the gay ghetto, a few hip-hop poets, two girls who made jewelry and knit hats, and an assortment of twenty-somethings who did various things like music and waitering” (23). For these bohemian youth, the girls’ apartments are safe havens; similarly, for Tuyen’s parents, Canada is a country of refuge. The narrator does not explicitly state from what the second-generation youth are seeking “refuge,” a significant term in light of contemporary global diasporas. Within the past decade, large volumes of people from countries such as Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq have sought refuge outside of their homeland. “Refuge” assumes a markedly different connotation for the second-generation

---

<sup>23</sup> Tuyen collects Torontonians’ desires (longings) and calligraphically transposes them onto pieces of cloth to attach to her *lubaio*.

youth who do not flee life-threatening war or its aftermath. However, the second-generation youth, many of whom are the children of refugees, experience some form of anxiety from which they attempt to escape. This anxiety is a product of racism and parental grief.<sup>24</sup>

Each girl's apartment qualifies as what bell hooks calls "homeplace," a site of resistance:

Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension . . . This task of making homeplace . . . was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination . . . This task of making homeplace, of making home a community of resistance, has been shared by black women globally, especially black women in white supremacist societies. (42)

Although hooks contends that black women establish and sustain homeplace, her concept applies to Tuyen's and Carla's apartments where second-generation youth assemble to escape and resist racism. Escape is a necessary precursor to resistance. According to Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn, "communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness" (qtd. in hooks 43). Tuyen's and Carla's apartments fulfill these functions, enabling the youth to restore their spirits before they struggle against racist oppression. As a "community of resistance," homeplace requires its members to be highly supportive of one another. Pennartz claims that "[t]he quality of atmosphere depends essentially on the quality of the interpersonal

---

<sup>24</sup> The second-generation youth in *WWALF* inherit "parental grief." See chapter three for more on inheritance.

relations, more specifically on the degree to which people try to approach each other” (99). People are accessible to one another within the girls’ apartments, which creates a “pleasant atmosphere” (Pennartz 99), at least in comparison to external spaces. In distinction to Tuyen’s and Carla’s apartments is Tuan and Cam’s house, in which communication is minimal. Tuan and Cam do not share a bedroom “so as not to have to talk to each other, to go over the worn language of disappointment” (60).

The primary second-generation character in *Certainty* is Gail, Matthew and Clara’s only child. Gail is twenty nine years old when she meets her partner, Ansel, while reporting on a story at the Vancouver hospital where he works as a doctor. She had recently returned to Vancouver after spending a few months reporting from the Arctic, so she had not yet found an apartment. Rather, she had been living in her van. Upon her return to Vancouver, she does not move in with her parents. Even when Ansel offers her a room in his house, she refuses. Gail’s living space is significant not only because a van violates traditional ideas of “home,” but also because a van is a vehicle, a means for transportation and movement. Gail’s “home” is constantly in transit.<sup>25</sup> In this, Thien introduces alternative constructions of “home” that are not necessarily rooted, grounded, or static.

Gail maintains her unconventional “home” space of the van for as long as possible, sacrificing her bodily comfort in exchange for a sense of freedom. She (permanently) moves in with Ansel only after catching the flu due to living in such cold

---

<sup>25</sup> When Gail is in the Arctic, she lives with and reports on the Chukchi, an indigenous people. Some Chukchi inform Gail that “once upon a time, their people lived nomadic lives” (199). Gail resembles the earlier generations of Chukchi in this respect as she never settles in one place.

conditions. In addition to caring for Gail during her bout of the flu, Ansel reads her passages from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Like her mother, Gail is inclined towards the exploration of foreign worlds and lives vicariously through the novel's characters.<sup>26</sup> Ansel always begins reading from his "favourite section on the oblivious Rain God, the miserable truck driver adored by clouds everywhere" (86). The Rain God of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* resembles Gail to some degree. Both characters are drivers constantly in motion. Although she is not wholly miserable like the Rain God, her lifestyle as a nomadic radio documentarian eventually compromises her happiness. In particular, Ansel has an affair during one of her extended absences. Whether or not she is aware of its risks, Gail cherishes the lifestyle that her van represents.

Eventually, Gail and Ansel purchase a house together "in Strathcona, the oldest neighbourhood in Vancouver. Even now, the Hastings Mill cabins, where workers lived a century ago, still stand" (4-5). According to historian W. Kaye Lamb, Hastings Mill<sup>27</sup> was "the nucleus around which the city of Vancouver grew up in the 1880s" (qtd. in Davis np). Gail and Ansel's house is located in a region that encompasses the past, a major theme in *Certainty* (and diaspora narratives more generally). In fact, Joe Moran states that in Britain, real estate agents have been "appealing to the simplicity and authenticity of the past. The most desirable properties are often renovated 'lodges' and 'cottages' . . . The association of the house with nostalgia has become inseparable from a marketing process in which memories are self-consciously stage-managed in order to convey the effects of 'period' and 'heritage'" (38). Gail and Ansel's house is "a restored

---

<sup>26</sup> Clara enjoys *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Journey to the West*.

<sup>27</sup> Hastings Mill was a sawmill. The surrounding settlement eventually developed into Vancouver.

Queen Anne, gabled windows on the top floors. A solid, unremarkable house. On windy days, he imagines he can feel the wooden beams of the house swaying” (5). It is significant that Ansel makes these observations after Gail dies.<sup>28</sup> The house is “unremarkable” in itself and although it is physically “solid,” he feels as though it is “unstable.” The Queen Anne architectural style, which was inspired by sixteenth and seventeenth century architectural trends in Britain, emerged in Canada during the late 1870s. White British settlers transported their “homes” to Canada in the best way possible – by replicating their former houses. The Queen Anne style “jump[ed] the Atlantic Ocean” (Maitland 36). Due to climate, material resources, terrain, and lifestyle, Queen Anne houses in Canada are distinct from those in Britain; however, “[t]he very Britishness of the style was seen as culturally and historically correct for English Canada, as architect and client alike cherished their ties to Britain” (Maitland 29). Gail and Ansel’s house privileges the “mother country,” but in the present, neither tenant identifies with Britain. They “rebuild” their Queen Anne house by neglecting its nationalist principles. “Home,” even its most stable manifestation of the physical building in which one lives, invites continuous reconstruction.

Ansel recalls how “[p]revious *homes* together [with Gail] had been small apartments in basements or attics” (5; emphasis added). For Ansel, “home” is not necessarily located in a physical space, but in Gail. It is with her that he feels most comfortable. When she is gone, their Queen Anne becomes a mere “house.” Gail temporarily leaves the house when Ansel confesses to having an affair. In this episode,

---

<sup>28</sup> Gail suddenly dies from pneumonia while working in Prince George, British Columbia.

Thien's diction is inflected with notions of diaspora, though on an individual scale. After hearing the devastating truth, Gail "tried to escape him, agitated, going from room to room" (109). Afterwards, she "did not go up to the bedroom. Instead, she slept in her office downstairs, some nights leaving the house entirely, taking the car, disappearing" (86). Gail uproots from the house due to this traumatic incident that interrupts her relatively content life. For Ansel, her departure creates "a rift, a heartbreak, dismantling everything that had come before" (86). The couple undergoes a diaspora-like rupture in their relationship. Ansel desperately tries to prevent her from leaving him, insisting upon "find[ing] a way from this place. But their days and nights entered a kind of limbo. They existed in the house, side by side, the ritual of their years together shielding them from a growing distance" (110). The situation their relationship enters is figured as a location, a "place" from which Ansel wants to escape. Their house becomes fraught with tension, and although they eventually reconcile, their relationship is never the same. Ansel and Gail cannot return to the original state of their relationship, "settling . . . finally, on a different ground" (86). This prolonged trauma unfolds in their Queen Anne house.

Gail's presence lingers in the house after she dies less than a year after her reconciliation with Ansel. While reminiscing on his life with Gail, Ansel notes how "their home is still very much how she left it. Her clothes, her belongings. All the rolls of reel-to-reel, the DAT and Mini Discs. Touch a button, and her voice fills the room" (101). These relics, similar to the relics of Quy with which Cam cannot part in *WWALF*, prevent Ansel from moving out. In a personal essay inspired by the death of his wife, Joseph

Boughey discusses domestic space as a site of death, grief, and bereavement. He

confesses that their

house is like a store of images, with much unchanged since she left, even the contents of the wardrobes and the arrangement of crockery and kitchen utensils. Her book collection . . . and the dressing table she bought with her first earnings in the early 1960s, spur reminders and perhaps provide psychic comfort. The undisturbed parts are akin to photographs, which nevertheless reflect the inevitability of passing time<sup>29</sup> . . . It is not quite the same environment that she knew, but, like an archive, it contains elements that have survived for later discovery and interpretation, like a stage set that gives some framework to a play. (234)

“[L]ike an archive or museum of artefacts” (Boughey 237), the Queen Anne house preserves a past that includes Gail. Ansel tells his neighbour: “I’ve thought about leaving . . . But everything I have is in this house” (102). The preposition “in” refers not only to material items within the house, which trigger memories of his life with Gail, but also to the house itself. In fact, “as an actual building, made of solid materials such as brick, slate and timber,” a house “gives us the reassuring sense that memories can be nurtured and recovered, excavated from a containable past” (Moran 28). Joe Moran insists that holistically, “houses retain and convey memories of the most routine elements of our lives” (28). The Queen Anne house is “the space of habit” (Moran 40) from which Ansel cannot bear to depart because it is steeped in the comforting routine that emerged after years of living with Gail.

The tangible “homes” in *WWALF* and *Certainty* – Tuyen’s and Carla’s apartments, Gail’s van, and Gail and Ansel’s Queen Anne house – exist within the larger

---

<sup>29</sup> Boughey discusses photographs further on page 238. He mentions photographs of himself and of his wife, which trigger memories. Their mantel also features photographs of his wife’s family, some of whom he never met. These photographs signal memories and a past that is inaccessible to him. For more on the relationship between photographs and memory in *WWALF* and *Certainty*, see chapter three.

city space. Toronto and Vancouver are the urban settings in *WWALF* and *Certainty* respectively. Through constant movement, the second-generation characters in both texts navigate their urban surroundings.

In *WWALF*, the city of Toronto assumes a central role. Molly McKibbin points out that “the city is almost an autonomous entity . . . bestowed with the particular force that will dominate the lives of the characters. We are told of its sounds, smells, and physicality before we ever meet its inhabitants” (502). Indeed, the city governs the lives of its inhabitants to some degree. However, McKibbin does not elaborate on how the city’s inhabitants likewise shape and transform the city. In fact, *WWALF* opens with a reference to the constructed nature of Toronto: “This city hovers above the forty-third parallel; that’s illusory of course” (1). In addition, Toronto’s landscape is at the mercy of its developers: “Next door the Lebanese shawarma place, which had been a doughnut shop, and had once been an ice cream store, and would in another incarnation be a sushi bar, now exhaled odours of roasted lamb” (212). Urban sociologist Robert Park explains the dialectic between any city and its inhabitants:

[I]t is in the urban environment – in a world which man himself has made – that mankind first achieved an intellectual life and acquired those characteristics that distinguish him from the lower animals and from primitive man. For the city and the urban environment represents man’s most consistent and, on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in . . . But if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself. (qtd. in Harvey 159)

Similar to Tuan and Cam in *WWALF* and Matthew and Clara in *Certainty*, people are limited by the institutional processes inherent in city life. However, people

simultaneously engage with these processes. David Harvey asserts that cities are invested with people's imagination: "As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves. Projects concerning what we want our cities to be are, therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we want . . . to become" (159). In *WWALF*, the second-generation protagonists maintain a symbiotic relationship with the city of Toronto. Kit Dobson even proposes that Tuyen and her friends "construct a new Toronto from below" (np).

The second-generation protagonists embrace Toronto, effectively distancing themselves from the ancestral homeland. When their parents recount "how life used to be 'back home'," the youth "wanted to shout at them, 'Well, you're not *there!*'" (20). The youth maintain anti-nostalgic attitudes and live in the present moment "at their own birthplace – the city. They were born in the city from people born elsewhere" (20). In fact, Tuyen considers Toronto a "surrogate city" (68) because like a parent, it teaches her survival skills. Toronto mentors Tuyen in ways that her biological parents cannot. Tuan and Cam are too preoccupied grieving over their lost son to devote due attention to their living children. When Tuyen and her brother "were born in the city," "a new blood had entered their veins; as if their umbilical cords were also attached to this mothering city" (67). Toronto assumes a maternal role, giving life to its second-generation children. Indeed, Tuyen truly "felt alive" (212) in the city.

The youth attempt to carve out a space for themselves in Toronto. Dobson argues that in *WWALF*,

the younger generation [represented in Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku] . . . 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? . . . The [second-generation] 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. (np)

This urban youth culture relies heavily on graffiti, a core element of New York City's hip hop culture (*Encyclopedia of New York State* np), as a means for self-definition and expression. Some of Tuyen's graffiti artist friends inscribe their signatures – “Kumaran's grinning pig, Abel's 'narc' initial, . . . Keeran's desert and Jericho's lightning bolt” (32) – on various buildings throughout Toronto. When Carla passes through Toronto's graffiti decorated neighbourhoods en route to meet her father, a dreaded task, she “felt slightly comforted . . . she had asked them often to paint the whole city over . . . They had practically filled all the walls of the city” (32). Like its predecessor, the second generation attempts to invent “home” in the city. They approach this project by collaboratively producing the walls of their “home.” The graffiti is not an eyesore, but a beautiful display of urban youth (counter-)culture. The narrator remarks that the spray paintings announce the “spiritual presences of Tuyen, Oku, and Carla's generation” (134). The youth's presence is “spiritual” because they are not entirely present in the city. Rather, they exist on the city's margins, refusing to assimilate (and subsequently become multicultural commodities). The second-generation protagonists do not necessarily perceive these marginal spaces as disenfranchised locations. Rather, they recuperate the subway halls, alleyways, and ghettos by displaying their art there. In fact, the graffiti

artists complement Toronto's landscape as their spray paintings "filled in the details of the city's outlines" (134).

The city offers more hope to the second generation than it does to the first. For example, as Carla bikes to the Mimico Correctional Institute to visit Jamal, incarcerated for carjacking, she "raised her back from its hunch, [and] felt a small hopeful breeze" (30). Carla interprets this breeze as hopeful while her parents and other members of their generation would likely feel indifferently towards it. Her generation can extract goodness from the city while the disenchanting and beleaguered first generation cannot. For Carla, Toronto could be a utopia. According to Harvey, "[i]n their early incarnations, utopias were usually given a distinctly urban form" (156). Indeed,

[t]he association between city life and personal freedoms, including the freedom to explore, invent, create, and define new ways of life, has a long and intricate history. Generations of migrants have sought the city as a haven from rural repressions. But the city is equally the site of anxiety and anomie. It is the place of the anonymous alien, the underclass, . . . the site of an incomprehensible 'otherness' (immigrants, gays, the mentally disturbed, the culturally different, the racially marked), the terrain of pollution (moral as well as physical) and of terrible corruptions, the place of the damned that needs to be enclosed and controlled. (158)

Thus, utopia can never be fully realized. It is simultaneously "no place" and "a happy place" (Harvey 173). In response to the impossibility of utopia, Michel Foucault conceives of "heterotopia," "spaces of alternate ordering. Heterotopia organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them. That alternate ordering marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way

of doing things” (Hetherington qtd. in Harvey 184).<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the second-generation protagonists recuperate various areas of the city and render them heterotopias.

The hope that Carla maintains (and that her parents relinquished) for the city is crucial. Harvey insists that “alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change” (195). So, the Graffiti Boys’ spray paintings and Tuyen’s art installations are not futile projects, but meaningful (counter-)culture struggles to create a more comfortable “home” than their parents did. Within the city, the second-generation protagonists “felt alive. More alive, they thought, than most people around them. They believed in it, this living. Its raw openness. They saw the street outside, its chaos, as their only hope. They felt the city’s violence and ardour in one emotion” (212). Tuyen and her friends appreciate Toronto’s disorder, a (heterotopian) state of being that the white hegemony constantly attempts to correct through policies such as multiculturalism. According to Eva Mackey, official “[m]ulticulturalism’ was developed as a mode of managing internal differences within the nation” (50). Canadian multiculturalism embraces visible minorities insofar as they express their culture in unthreatening ways such as food, music, clothing, and dance. The second-generation youth resist the order inherent in Canadian multicultural policies by espousing urban chaos.

The second-generation protagonists thrive in the city despite encountering some of the same racial and socioeconomic barriers that impeded their parents’ happiness.

---

<sup>30</sup> Harvey complains that “[t]he concept of ‘heterotopia’ has the virtue of insisting upon a better understanding of the heterogeneity of space but it gives no clue as to what . . . utopianism might look like. Foucault challenges and helps destabilize [the dominant social order] . . . but provides no clue as to how any kind of alternative might be constructed” (185).

Tuyen, Carla, and Oku recognize that Canada is not a haven as advertised: Tuyen sarcastically calls Canada “the promised land” (65), Carla bitterly notes how her mother worked “in the immigrant sweat shop they call this city” (212), and Oku warily perceives the city as a “prison” for black men like himself (165-66). Brand does not flinch while exposing Toronto’s ugly side. The first generation yearns for its successor to integrate into “regular Canadian life” (47); however, Tuyen and her friends “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). The narrator aptly notes how coming of age is difficult for any youth, and even more so for visible minorities like Tuyen and her friends. Although fifty per cent of Toronto’s current population was born outside of Canada, whiteness is still privileged. Tuyen and her friends refuse to perform as the brown-noser and/or the fool. In fact, “they’d decided instinctively that this idea [of gaining the white hegemony’s mocking acceptance by enacting demeaning roles] was scary” (48). Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie inherently reject hegemonic structures. This similarity unites them into a generation that does not want to belong to the nation (as it currently is), but wants some other form of “home.”

The second generation also critiques socioeconomic conditions in Canada. As Carla bikes home from the Mimico Correctional Institute after visiting her brother, she passes through “the upscale region of High Park, the old British-style houses. The people who must inhabit these with their neat little lives made her sicker to her stomach than

usual because she'd just left her brother" (29). Carla's callous observations on the High Park region and its inhabitants are not motivated by jealousy, but disgust over the unfair distribution of wealth in Canadian society. In addition, she channels her anger at the Britishness of High Park. This region aims to represent Canada as white-British, a falsehood in the present (with a fifty percent foreign-born population) and in the past (with an aboriginal population before white settlement).<sup>31</sup> She notes how "the trees held nothing. The manicured circle of flowers, the false oasis of the park, only made her sicker" (29). Indeed, the High Park region is a "false oasis," a mirage for poor people like herself.

In distinction to the High Park region, Jackie and her parents live in Vanauley Way, a poor and predominantly black ghetto located in the Alexandra Park region of downtown Toronto. In his discussion of Baltimore's inner city deterioration, a case that can be extended to Toronto, Harvey notes that "geographical disparities in wealth and power increase to fashion a metropolitan world of chronically uneven geographical development" (148). In *WWALF*, Toronto's city officials neglect Vanauley Way because "they didn't think that poor people deserved beauty" (261). Residents protest, "saying to the city . . . Don't drop all your negative vibes on us, we're trying to live the same as everybody, but you couldn't see it in your heart to put a garden here, if you tarred over every piece of earth, then don't blame us. Would it have killed them [city officials] to splash a little colour on the buildings?" (262). Race and class intersect to render residents

---

<sup>31</sup> *WWALF* does not elaborate much on aboriginal affairs in Canada. The narrator mentions the issue once early in the text: "All of them [Torontonians] sit on Ojibway land, but hardly any of them know it or care because the genealogy is willfully untraceable except in the name of the city itself" (4).

of Vanauley Way dispensable. Harvey argues that this trend is nothing new and that municipal governments work to “divide up the urban realm into a patchwork quilt of islands of relative affluence [suburbs] struggling to secure themselves in a sea of squalor and decay. The overall effect is division and fragmentation of the metropolitan space, a loss of sociality across diversity . . . that becomes politically fractious if not dysfunctional” (152).

If city officials were to invest more money into the maintenance and development of Vanauley Way, “[t]he sense of space might have triggered lighter emotions, less depressing thoughts, a sense of well-being. God, hope! The park wouldn’t have driven Jackie’s father and mother to drink like it had” (263). Vanauley Way heavily influences the thoughts and actions of its inhabitants, who succumb to the depressing atmosphere. If Vanauley Way (and by proxy, its inhabitants) were more appreciated, perhaps “[e]ven the dream of staying in this city would have survived” (263). Jackie’s parents, originally from Nova Scotia, often discussed returning east. However, their destitution prevented this dream from materializing. In contrast, Jackie does not yearn to escape the city, partly because she establishes an alternative space for herself. She periodically lives in the apartment above Ab and Zu, her downtown clothing store.

Brand also calls attention to the racism that young black males encounter in the city. Oku bitterly recalls his unwarranted arrest. Although “[t]he cops didn’t find anything on him . . . [t]hey took him to fifty-two Division. They couldn’t find anything to charge him with and let him go around 6 A.M.” (165). Likewise, Jamal “saw it [Toronto] as something to get tangled in” (32). Oku concludes that in Toronto, young black males

“were in prison, although the bars were invisible” (166). *WWALF* represents young black males as cynics, and rightly so, given their treatment. In his article, “Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada,” Rinaldo Walcott discusses how “blackness in Canada is situated on a continuum that runs from the invisible to the hyper-visible” (278).

Blackness simultaneously marginalizes – renders invisible – and incriminates – renders hyper-visible – Oku and Jamal. The city is fixated on their skin colour as a marker of delinquency. Their allegedly transgressive behaviour renders them noncompliant, worthless, and ultimately invisible citizens. For example, Jamal tells Carla that his nickname within the Mimico Correctional Institute is “Ghost” (30). Literally and figuratively, he is invisible: he is imprisoned and therefore unseen to the general public, and he assumes the role of a “ghost,” an ephemeral entity that floats between the realms of the living and dead. Jamal takes pride in his persona as the stereotypical tough black prisoner. He even bears a branded “G” (for “Ghost”) on his left breast. This is his attempt to define himself, but it is a painful process: the brand rises “in an unhealed keloid. It was furious-looking red, parts of it still oozing” (30). The narrator stresses how difficult it is for black men to define themselves in the hostile city.

In *Certainty*, Thien emphasizes the city of Vancouver’s historical, geographical, and cultural vastness with sweeping descriptions: “Even now, the Hastings Mill cabins, where workers lived a century ago, still stand. Past the bustle of Chinatown, the downtown core floats like a picture hung against the North Shore mountains. East, and the mills are visible, Ballentyne Pier, with its brightly coloured stacks of containers and the tall freight elevators” (5). Vancouver’s historically, geographically, and culturally

expansive terrain is contingent upon its dynamism. Over time, the city develops. Gail and Ansel regularly purchase their breakfast at “New Town Bakery” (6, 188), a subtle reference to Vancouver’s ever-changing face. Even Vancouver’s senior citizens embody dynamism: “At Strathcona Elementary School, the Sunday morning tai chi class is already in motion . . . grandparents in neon track suits, moving across the pavement in an ensemble, a fluid echo of cause and effect” (5). The senior citizens’ tai chi exercises display cause and effect, the principles that propel time forward. Matthew cannot pursue this forward direction of time. After his departure from Sandakan, he enters a perpetual state of longing for the past. He never considers Vancouver as “home” and therefore withdraws from it. He is stuck (in another place at a particular point in time). In contrast, Gail enjoys exploring her city surroundings.

Thien advances the theme of environmental exploration through a controlling metaphor of movement. Throughout the text, Gail traverses the city, indulging her propensity to wander. As a child, she and her father walked down the streets of Vancouver together. She “used to whisper the street names under her breath” (18) and enjoyed “singing the names to herself, *Keefer, Pender, Adanac*” (19). Such activities reinforced Gail’s comfort with her birthplace of the city. She also recalls a family ritual that involved movement within the city. Every Sunday, Matthew would “drive [his family] away from our house, towards downtown, the ocean . . . As we drove, he would keep up a running commentary, proudly pointing things out to me, to my mother. Naming the landmarks, wanting us to see the things he saw” (261). The trajectory of the family vehicle points towards the ocean, a prominent motif in diaspora narratives. The ocean, a

constantly moving body of water, physically separates Canada from Gail's ancestral (paternal and maternal) homelands. It is significant that Matthew's final destination during these weekly family outings is the ocean, the point of origin by proxy. However, visiting the ocean inculcates a different mentality in Gail. She does not desire return, but further movement.

Gail achieves movement through the city via her pastime of jogging and gravitates towards the trails of Vancouver's Trout Lake region. Ansel tells one of his patients that "Gail is a runner" and that "sometimes she goes there [to Trout Lake]. It's only a few kilometers from our house" (93). It is fitting that "a lake in the middle of the city" (93) comprises the geography surrounding Gail and Ansel's house. Gail requires water, or perhaps the movement inherent in water, to feel "at home." She also runs past her parents' house every day, "detour[ing] through the alley, into the garden, blowing a playful kiss to her mother as she passed. Clara would watch the easy movement of her daughter's body until it disappeared around the corner" (17). Movement is "easy," natural, or intrinsic for Gail. Her detour past her parents' house suggests a strong familial connection that partly governs her sense of "home."<sup>32</sup>

Gail and Ansel also move through the city via bicycle. On one occasion, they engineer an efficient vehicle by attaching a generator to Ansel's bicycle. This idea was inspired by Gail's experiences in Prague and Amsterdam where biking is extremely

---

<sup>32</sup> See chapter three for the ways that "home" and family intersect.

popular. The generator-powered bicycle is “a bit of Amsterdam in Vancouver” (97), a reference to the latter city’s transnational nature.<sup>33</sup>

Biking for Ansel is like jogging for Gail. Ansel is a regular cyclist when he meets Gail.<sup>34</sup> After she dies, biking becomes his coping mechanism: “The bicycle ride home is what saves him [from grief]. A decade of the same route, down Heather Street, his body swaying past the roundabouts, down the sloping hill to the sea. Even the cars seem to scatter around him” (97). His movement, which generates such a high amount of kinetic energy that city traffic disperses around his body, is oriented towards “home,” the place where Gail’s presence resides. The sea, located at the bottom of the hill, is another image of movement. In fact, water engulfs the entire scene as it is raining during Ansel’s bike ride home. He notices how “on Keefer Street, the lights from Chinatown shine a red and yellow river across the wet pavement” (97). This optical illusion in which China’s official colours are reflected in the (Canadian) water signals the theme of “cultural transfer overseas” (Anderson 580). The reflected red and yellow lights constitute a “river,” a flowing body of water. This is an appropriate image because Chinese migrants crossed a large body of water to arrive in Canada, where they established Chinatown(s). By no means does Vancouver’s Chinatown exactly mirror China. In fact, Kay Anderson argues that “Chinatown is a social construction within a cultural history and a tradition of

---

<sup>33</sup> As Vertovec notes, transnationalism is often associated with syncretic cultural reproduction (451-52).

<sup>34</sup> Gail is also a biker, though not to same degree as her partner. While living in Amsterdam, a city in which half of the traffic movements are by bike (see <http://www.amsterdam.info/transport/bikes/>), she uses her bike regularly (197-98). Interestingly enough, Ani owns a bike when she lives in Sandakan: “The bicycle, an Australian-made Malvern Star, was painted blue, and the frame felt almost weightless. When she leaned her body forward, the wheels seemed to lift off the ground” (145). Ani is compelled to move and later adopts a transnational lifestyle.

imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality in and for the West” (581). Ansel navigates his way past Chinatown to arrive “home.”

Biking is also a primary mode of transportation in *WWALF*. Like Ansel, Carla is an avid biker: “She had ridden so fast, and she’d ridden, out of her way, all over the city, burning off a white light on her body” (28). Dobson contends that Carla’s passion for biking belongs to a “politics of drifting” that often appears in Brand’s writing:

[Marlene] 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).<sup>35</sup> 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.

In order to sustain this “politics of drifting,” the second-generation protagonists “remain in motion . . . to escape the domination of contemporary biopolitics, the process through which the body itself becomes subject to legislation and surveillance” (Dobson np). Thus, the controlling metaphor of movement in *Certainty* also pervades *WWALF*. A prime example is when Tuyen alters her studio apartment to reinforce a “politics of drifting”: “She had surreptitiously broken down the wall between her bedroom and the kitchen, making one large room for her installations . . . She had virtually destroyed the apartment. If she ever moved, she would have to do it late at night and very quickly and

---

<sup>35</sup> In *WWALF*, the Euro-American and immigrant “models” are not mutually exclusive. Tuan and Cam desire, often simultaneously, to return to their homeland and to belong to Canada.

without a trace” (25). Tuyen transforms her apartment into an open space that is highly conducive to the free flow of her body from one area to another. Walls no longer restrict her movement. Because of these unapproved renovations, if Tuyen were to move out, she would have to (re)enact her parents’ experience on the bay in Vietnam that night many years ago. Like Tuan and Cam, Tuyen would escape her abode quickly and stealthily during the night. For her, “home” is not a permanent place.

Tuyen and her friends “felt as if they inhabited two countries—their parents’ and their own” (20). This divided subjectivity supports Ellen Quigley’s assertion that “Brand pursues a rhizomatic<sup>36</sup> form of political resistance in her writing, in which one point can connect to any other in order to form communities across borders” (Dobson np). Indeed, the second-generation protagonists in *WWALF* and *Certainty* often approach “home” as an abstraction that extends beyond the building and even the metropolis in which they live. For them, “home” is not necessarily a single place, but it can be an affinity for movement and travel to multiple places. Brand and Thien present the second-generation characters as transnational citizens, people who align, though not attach, themselves with more than one culture and country, usually after extensive travel.

In *WWALF*, Tuyen and her friends imaginatively transgress ethnocultural and geopolitical borders. Their identification with multiple cultures and countries renders them transnational citizens.<sup>37</sup> Transnational citizenship intimates a sense of “home” that

---

<sup>36</sup> “Rhizome” is a term that appears in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Any point in a rhizome must be connected to another. See <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/kellner/deleuze.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Tuyen and her friends may identify with multiple cultures and countries, but have only ever lived in Canada. Thus, “transnational citizenship” may be too gratuitous of a term. Less ambiguous examples of transnational citizens are Gail and Wideh in *Certainty*.

is neither here – in Canada – nor there – in the lost homeland. The second-generation protagonists do not oscillate between here and there; rather, they never attain a full sense of belonging to either place. They position themselves and establish “home” in the in-between, liminal space. Tuyen meditates on “the feeling of living in two dimensions . . . of being on the brink, at the doorway” (20). However, it requires great effort to reach and remain at this abstract threshold. The second-generation protagonists could be interpellated by Canadian multiculturalism – “be defined by the city” (66) like their parents – or they could slip into a longing for the ancestral homeland. The narrator describes how “each [of the second-generation protagonists] left home in the morning as if making a long journey, untangling themselves from the seaweed of other shores wrapped around their parents. Breaking their doorways, they left the sleepwalk of their mothers and fathers and ran across the unobserved borders of the city” (20). The violence of “breaking” through their parents’ doorways highlights the second generation’s struggle to reach that desired liminal space. It is a daily feat for Tuyen and her friends.

The city of Toronto is a transnational space.<sup>38</sup> Among others, ethnocultural enclaves like Chinatown,<sup>39</sup> Greektown,<sup>40</sup> and Kensington Market,<sup>41</sup> characterize the city. Oku remarks on the ethnocultural landscape:

---

<sup>38</sup> Kit Dobson argues that Toronto is what Saskia Sassen would define a “global city.” In her 1991 text, *The Global City*, Sassen examines the global influence that London, New York, and Tokyo possess.

<sup>39</sup> Toronto contains multiple Chinatowns, the oldest and largest is located at the intersection of Dundas and Spadina.

<sup>40</sup> Greektown is located along Danforth.

<sup>41</sup> Kensington Market is located between Dundas and College, west of Spadina. The area began as a Jewish community in the 1930s, but has since transformed into an “eclectic mix of cultures” that includes Portuguese, West Indians, Koreans, and Chinese. See <http://www.torontotourism.com/Visitor/WhatToSeeAndDo/Neighbourhoods/KensingtonMarket.htm>.

The whole strip of Eglinton between Marlee and Dufferin was full of West Indian stores selling hot food, haircuts, wigs, cosmetics, and clothes. There were stores selling barrels for stuffing goods to send to families in the Caribbean and there were stores selling green bananas, yams, pepper sauce, mangos, and salt cod, all tastes from the Caribbean carried across the Atlantic to this strip of the city. Wrapped in oil and sugar and pepper, waxed in onions and thyme; modified, hardened, and made acrid and stale by distance; hardly recognizable if any here were to really take a trip to where they once called home. (190)

The store along this strip that sells barrels “for stuffing goods to send to families” promotes transnational connections between Caribbean people in Canada and those in the Caribbean. The traffic of Caribbean foods north to Canada is an example of cultural exchange, a theme that Paul Gilroy pursues in *The Black Atlantic*. As Oku notes, the Caribbean foods that arrive in Canada are altered in a variety of ways – from preparation to pickling – and therefore, exhibit a unique, hybrid flavour that deviates from the “original.”

The narrator comments that “lives in the city are doubled, tripled, conjugated” (5). This manifold identification appears in Tuyen’s art. She “mounted an installation once of herself in bubble wrap, with stickers from various countries pasted on her naked body. Calling the installation *Traveller* she instructed the audience to lift her up and pass her around the room” (64). In this unorthodox installation, Tuyen embodies transnationalism. She becomes the *Traveller* in form and practice by covering her body with worldly stickers and physically traversing the room.

A prime example of worldliness in *WWALF* is the World Cup, the international soccer tournament that occurs every four years. Tuyen and her friends participate in the 2002 World Cup festivities. In the city, “cars speed about flying emblems of various

nationalities” (203). In “Recovering the social: globalization, football and transnationalism,” Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson argue that “football [soccer] is the cultural form *par excellence* for tracing . . . contemporary global processes” (182). The image of flag-bearing cars that congest the streets of Toronto illustrates how the global can exist at the local level.<sup>42</sup> The city enters a frenzy that is highly attractive to Tuyen. She “loved World Cup. She loved being in the middle of whirling people, people spinning on emotion” (204). Once again, this is a reference to the second generation’s restlessness and propensity for movement. In fact, Tuyen traverses the city during the World Cup tournament, taking pictures along the way:

She’d been with her camera to every street party this June. To Little Italy, to the English pub, where the reactions are exuberant as a soccer riot in Manchester but contained within four walls; she stood outside of the German pub and was shy to take pictures; at the Brazilian *cevejaría* on College Street she danced the samba in between shots. Today she heard the honking horns heading up to Bloor Street, and she collected her gear and raced up Bathurst to Korea Town. (204)

Tuyen crosses pseudo-national borders within the city itself, entering spaces that house what Giulianotti and Robertson call “supporter subcultures.” In this episode, Brand does not present transnationalism as a condition that is based on syncretism,<sup>43</sup> but on discrete pockets of nationalism and national pride. However, Tuyen quickly vacillates between various national sentiments during the World Cup festivities, and when she does align herself with any particular nation, it is only for a brief period of time.

---

<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, Giulianotti and Robertson have applied the concept of “glocalization” to soccer. Glocalization is a conflation of globalization and localization that “refer[s] to ‘real world’ endeavors to recontextualize global phenomena or macroscopic processes with respect to local cultures” (168).

<sup>43</sup> Vertovec points out that transnationalism is often associated with “a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions, and everyday practices” (451) that are syncretized from more than one heritage.

Brand depicts the World Cup as a transformative force that enables some people to imaginatively transgress racial, cultural, and state boundaries. Tuyen and her friends revel in the World Cup festivities, celebrating with other visible minorities and dabbling in their ethnocultural customs. To some extent then, the second generation subscribes to Canadian multiculturalism, though their motives are political. For example, Tuyen's support for the Korean soccer team is partly a reaction against a television announcer's ignorant comment: "'I didn't know we had a Korea Town in this city.' Asshole, she thought, you wouldn't. You fuckers live as if we don't live here. She wasn't Korean, of course, but World Cup made her feel that way. No Vietnamese team had made it, so today she was Korean" (204). Even the "usually subdued Carla [was] waving a Korean flag and singing '*Oh, Pil-seung Korea.*'" (209).<sup>44</sup> These two second-generation characters belong to "'self-inventing transnational fandoms' [that] are comprised of followers with little or no biographical attachment to the team and its home city or nation. Yet these followers adopt a thick cosmopolitan<sup>45</sup> social relationship to the team, enabling its particular habitus to shape significant aspects of their personal identities" (Giulianotti and Robertson 177). Indeed, when Tuyen and Carla enter Korea Town, they assume new identities: Tuyen confidently declares herself Korean and Carla's disposition dramatically

---

<sup>44</sup> During the 2002 World Cup, "Oh, Pil-seung Korea" was a popular chant in support of Korea's team. "Pil-seung" translates into English as "sure victory."

<sup>45</sup> As Giulianotti and Robertson define, "'Thick cosmopolitanism' registers a decidedly more universalist orientation towards, and engagement with, other cultures. Here, social actors actively embrace and 'learn from' other cultures within the glocalization process, though local groundings and attachments remain evident" (172-73). Tuyen and Carla may be considered cosmopolites, or "citizens of the world," in their willingness to embrace Korean culture.

changes.<sup>46</sup> The World Cup nourishes the second generation's transnational spirit; however, it also generates discord between nationalist groups. The narrator observes how "small neighbourhoods that seemed at least slightly reconciled break into sovereign bodies" (203). Thus, the World Cup concurrently unites and divides. According to Jonathan Rée, "[i]nternationality binds people to each other . . . by making them think of themselves as members one of another within the same transcendent unity of their nation. And it thereby acquires a unique and terrible social power: people will gladly kill for their nation, and gladly die for it, because they somehow manage to identify its life with their own" (83-84). The World Cup is a case in point. It brings out people's zealous national sentiments, which sometimes results in violent city-wide riots.

After partying in Korea Town, Tuyen and her friends relocate to a downtown bar on Bloor Street called Cyber's (210). "Cyber" gestures to a subculture that involves "people using technology and information in ways that deviate from the expected norms and mores and laws of society" (Hawks np). Tuyen and her friends maintain the same (counter-culture) philosophy, "find[ing] it necessary to evade official institutional structures, not just of the law but also of work and school, if freedom is to be imagined" (Brydon 108). Cyberspace, an increasingly occupied site, offers such freedom. Robin Cohen asserts that "[i]n the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or recreated through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination" (26). For some diasporans (and their descendants), cyberspace is a virtual/electronic "home" that enables them to sustain ties with others. Aptly enough, the

---

<sup>46</sup> Because of her Asian ancestry, Tuyen may be able to declare herself Korean more easily than Carla. However, both girls support Korea's soccer team because it is the non-white underdog.

second-generation protagonists – Tuyen, Carla, and Oku – occupy Cyber's bar. Youth can more easily locate "home" in emerging and abstract forms such as cyberspace while their parents are fixated on "home" as a nation-state (at a particular point in time).

Within Cyber's, the youth implicitly reflect upon transnationalism. Tuyen and her friends observe "a stream of identities [that] flowed past the bar's window: Sikhs in FUBU,<sup>47</sup> Portuguese girls in DKNY,<sup>48</sup> veiled Somali girls in Puma sneakers,<sup>49</sup> Colombian teenagers in tattoos . . . Trying to step across the borders of who they were. But they were not merely trying. They were, in fact, borderless" (213). The young Sikhs, Portuguese, Somalis, and Colombians embody transnationalism in action and appearance. Their identities are fluid, flowing past the window like a stream (of water) and they wear brands that have migrated to Canada from other countries. In fact, some of these brands have gone global. The clothing industry is an example of a mobile market that penetrates national boundaries. In addition to sporting these international brands, the youth brand themselves with tattoos to be cool, to "step across the borders of who they were" or perhaps who they were supposed to be as dictated by white Canadian society. Like Tuyen and her friends, the young Sikhs, Portuguese, Somalis, and Colombians – native-born, yet alien – are "borderless." They invent ways to transgress national and cultural borders.

---

<sup>47</sup> FUBU, an acronym for "For Us By Us," is a clothing company that started in Hollis, Queens (a predominantly African American community) of New York in 1992. FUBU manufactures urban streetwear.

<sup>48</sup> DKNY, an acronym for "Donna Karan New York," is a high end clothing line. DKNY products are sold in forty five countries around the world.

<sup>49</sup> Puma, an international corporation born in the early 1930s in Germany, creates "sportslifestyle" products such as apparel, shoes, accessories, and equipment. Its products are distributed to more than eighty countries. It even offers an Urban Mobility line: "Life can be pretty hectic, especially when you're in a city full of bustling pedestrians and bumper-to-bumper traffic. But take a deep breath (avoid the bus exhaust) because PUMA's Urban Mobility line can make your life a little less crazy and a little more enjoyable. With apparel, accessories, and a bike, Urban Mobility has every avenue covered, so you're always in style." See <http://un.puma.com>.

Likewise, Gail and her half-brother, Wideh,<sup>50</sup> in *Certainty* constantly travel. Their transnational lifestyle stems from their comfort with being in motion rather than from the trauma associated with diaspora. In distinction to what Steven Vertovec defines as “diaspora consciousness” – when one feels simultaneously “here and there” (450) – which is apparent in Matthew, Gail exhibits more of a “transnational consciousness” insofar as she refuses to fix herself to any nation-state she visits, even though she may live there for an extended period. “Transnational” as opposed to “diaspora” more accurately reflects Gail’s consciousness (and that of her generation more generally) because she does not belong to a mass exodus, a “diaspora” in the traditional sense of the word, at any point in her life. As such, she does not gravitate towards a lost homeland. She was born and raised in Vancouver, her “homeland,” and is never in danger of losing it. Rather, she opts to leave Vancouver on numerous occasions for school and work.

Gail epitomizes the transnational subject or the sojourner.<sup>51</sup> She is assigned her name, which Clara admits is a homonym for “a gale wind, a strong wind” (132), when she is still a fetus in her mother’s womb.<sup>52</sup> Gail seems predestined to lead a transnational life and lives up to her name by constantly moving. At the age of twenty one, she begins graduate studies in the Netherlands; however, half way through her program, she takes a

---

<sup>50</sup> Ani and Matthew’s son, conceived in Sandakan.

<sup>51</sup> Robin Cohen states that “a pattern of circular migration” is “best described in English as ‘sojourning’” (85). He applies this term to members of the Chinese trade diaspora who lived and worked in various locations overseas such as present-day Singapore during the nineteenth century (very close to present-day Malaysia, where Matthew’s and Ani’s childhoods transpire). The Chinese traders retained “a strong connection with ‘home’” (87) and periodically returned. Eventually, however, many of them permanently settled in the locations where they worked. See chapter four of *Global Diasporas* for a discussion on the Chinese trade diaspora. In *Certainty*, Gail is sojourner in that she does not form permanent links – in the form of citizenship and family, for example – that bind her to the nation-states she visits.

<sup>52</sup> The quotation regarding the origin of Gail’s name appears in a passage in which Clara reflects upon her arrival in Canada. Clara sits in an airplane, a vehicle that facilitates transnationalism, as she stares at the Canadian landscape below. Thus, even the narrative structure underscores Gail’s transnational spirit.

leave of absence (that becomes permanent), moves out of her apartment, and travels east. This abrupt decision to forfeit her studies for further travel results from her “restlessness” (196). Although she is passionately involved with a married professor at the time, she realizes that it is “a floundering, impossible affair” and thus, “cut her ties and applied for a visa to the Eastern Bloc” (196). Subsequently, Gail moves to Prague and rents an apartment with her new friend, Glyn Madden. The two women often “drove across the border to Germany in search of English-language novels” (196), indulging their wandering spirits in the process. Glyn works as a radio producer and introduces Gail to the world of radio.

Gail's profession as a radio documentarian reinforces her transnational sensibility, which agitates Ansel. He is troubled by how “she found it so easy to leave for months at a time” (109). Gail is not bothered by temporary, perhaps even permanent, homelessness. Her career takes her to various locations, from North America to Europe to the Arctic. After Gail learns that she must travel to Amsterdam for an assignment, she reflects on the current state of her life (a tumultuous period because Ansel has recently confessed to his affair) and feels “a wave of claustrophobia” (193). This sensation compels her to think, “*I have to do this. I need to be away*” (196). Being away comforts Gail during her time of distress.

Her relationship with Ansel also provides insight into her transnational sensibility. Ansel differs from Gail in his desire for official stability: “Once, long ago, he asked her to marry him, but she pushed them both away from that possibility. She did not want to get married, she wanted a different kind of relationship. Each day choosing to be with

one another” (189). Gail privileges the choice to remain in or abandon the relationship. She does not want to be anchored to any place or person. When she learns of Ansel's affair, she “imagined packing a suitcase, walking away. A thought that, just for an instant, sent a rush of weightlessness through her heart” (189). She is not averse to the instability that her departure would produce. Similar to Carla in *WWALF*,<sup>53</sup> Gail yearns for “weightlessness,” the literal and figurative manifestations of which would be highly conducive to transnational travel.

Wideh is a second example of the transnational subject. As a child, he “spent hours gazing at maps, leafing through the heavy atlas that Ani had given him for his birthday” (252). His affinity for travel is forged at a young age. Even the Indonesian folk tales he recites to his mother contain transnational themes (252-53).<sup>54</sup> Later, he becomes a photojournalist (258), a career that demands constant travel. When Ani passes away, Wideh “had come home and stayed for half a year” (233) with Ani's husband (his surrogate father), Sipke. It is significant that the narrator describes Wideh as returning “home,” since he, Ani, and Sipke previously lived in various countries from Indonesia to the Netherlands. To some degree then, “home” is situated in family as opposed to a

---

<sup>53</sup> The narrator describes Carla as a “light.” She is “light” in two senses: one, she generates a great deal of kinetic energy through biking and therefore seems to “shine”; two, her apartment contains very little clutter and as such, she is “light” in terms of mass (without baggage).

<sup>54</sup> In one folk tale, Wideh elaborates on how the world began with “the sea and the sky, and a single bird that had nowhere to rest.” So, this bird pit the sea and the sky against each other. The sea crashed waves against the sky and the sky hurtled boulders upon the sea. After a lengthy battle, “many islands were standing on the water. The bird flew from one to the next, very satisfied with his cleverness.” Although the bird now has land on which to rest, it still travels from island to island, thus maintaining its exploratory habits.

location.<sup>55</sup> Like his half-sister and surrogate father, however, Wideh has a “restlessness in him and the world was calling” (233), so he leaves “home” to resume work.

In *Certainty*, the second-generation characters do not exhibit the “diaspora consciousness” of their parents, but a variation of it that can be termed “transnational consciousness.” However, Thien does not romanticize transnational consciousness; instead, she presents some of its negative qualities, especially through Gail. Perhaps most striking is how Gail dies away from her Vancouver “home” while working in Prince George. She is nomadic until the end of her life, not an entirely comforting prospect because she dies alone. Gail and Wideh enjoy, perhaps even need, the freedom that a transnational lifestyle affords. However, assuming the role of the sojourner, nomad, wanderer, or transnational subject entails great risk.

Upon witnessing their parents’ troubled relations with “home,” the second-generation protagonists in *WWALF* and *Certainty* approach “home” with caution. They depart, to some degree, from their parents’ approaches to “home.” The younger generation believes in a “home” that is contingent on dynamism and movement rather than spatial-temporal constancy.

---

<sup>55</sup> See chapter three for a discussion on how family influences one’s conception of “home.”

### Chapter 3: The Dynamic Family

The first- and second- generation characters in *WWALF* and *Certainty* may approach “home” differently, but their interaction nonetheless constitutes one element of “home”: “the place where one lives, especially with one’s family” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Some sociologists contend that the concept of “home” belongs to “an ideological trinity: ‘family,’ ‘home,’ and ‘community.’ Ideas of what constitutes a ‘proper’ family have shaped the ways in which individuals relate to one another in the intimacy of their domestic life” (Munro and Madigan 107). “Home” and family are intimately entangled. Brand and Thien demonstrate how one’s achievement of a sense of belonging does not only involve a negotiation of space, but also of familial relations. In *WWALF* and *Certainty*, dispersion dramatically alters traditional family dynamics, but the family maintains exceptional power and can operate as a “home.”

“Home” evokes the private domain of family life. R. D Laing states: “The *family as a system* is internalized. Relations and operations between elements and sets of elements are internalized, not elements in isolation. Elements may be persons, things, or part-objects” (4). He stresses that “[t]he ‘family’ is not an introjected [internalized] object, but an introjected set of relations” (6). As an internalized system, the family occupies a prominent place in one’s mind. In fact, “[w]ithin the [actual] family, the [internalized] ‘family’ may be felt as the whole world” and as such, “the preservation of the ‘family’ [as a system] is equated with the preservation of self and the world and the dissolution of the ‘family’ . . . is equated with death of self and world-collapse” (14). The family is contingent upon interrelated elements and therefore, is highly vulnerable to

disruption. The disruptive dispersions in *WWALF* and *Certainty* threaten the survival of the family. However, Brand and Thien depict the family as a resilient system that ultimately remains intact despite diaspora.

In *WWALF*, the family is of paramount importance to Tuan and Cam. As Kwok Bun Chan and Louis-Jacques Dorais observe regarding mass emigration from Vietnam during the 1970s, “Vietnamese refugees strived to move across continents and oceans as families and rarely as individuals” (np). The loss of Quy ruptures the Vu family and motivates Tuan and Cam to maintain an even tighter reign on their children than they normally would. For example, when Tuyen’s older sister, Ai, decides to move to Montreal, Tuan and Cam vehemently object, “screaming that she was breaking up the family” (268). Although Tuan and Cam diligently guard their children, the Vu family still undergoes radical transformation.

Tuyen eagerly embraces some of Canada’s cultural values, especially freedom and independence. Her adoption of such values offends her parents, whose traditional Vietnamese upbringing promotes children’s obedience of and respect for elders. Such cultural and generational differences create major conflict within the Vu family. Tuyen desperately wants to escape her family, but cannot do so because she feels an unexplainable and unrelenting loyalty towards it.

One of the major issues of contention between Tuyen and her parents is the balance of power. Field work on Vietnamese communities in North America reveals “a decline in power and authority of family elders” in comparison to those in Vietnam (Kibria, *Family Tightrope* 146). In Vietnam, parents can discipline their children (even

those in their late teens) verbally and/or physically. In contrast, Canada's legal and cultural context forbids this degree of parental clout.<sup>56</sup> In fact, "for many [Vietnamese] men, the decline in parental authority exacerbated the more general sense of loss that had been part of the migration process for them" (Kibria, *Family Tightrope* 149). When Tuan and Cam arrive in Canada, not only does their power over their children greatly diminish, but their children actually *gain* power.

This shift in power occurs primarily in the domain of language. Because Tuan and Cam can barely speak English when they arrive in Canada, they must rely on their children. Second language acquisition is very difficult, especially for adults, so even after spending a number of years in a host society, adult diasporans may continue to struggle in this arena. Dorais states that "[s]ince their arrival in Canada, Indochinese<sup>57</sup> refugees have consistently noted the severity of language problems . . . in a national conference on refugee resettlement in Ottawa organized by the Canadian Federation of Vietnamese Associations in 1982, every speaker ranked language as the first difficulty to overcome, in relation to work, education, health services, housing, and so on" ("Language Use and Adaptation" 52). The situation is no different for Tuan and Cam, whose "children were

---

<sup>56</sup> In a series of interviews with Vietnamese American families, Nazli Kibria discovers that what is considered "abuse" in North American society is simply "discipline" in Vietnamese society. It was not uncommon for Vietnamese children born in the United States (or those who had immigrated to the United States at a young enough age to absorb its cultural values) to call the police when their parents hit or even threatened to hit them. Such events created major rifts in the family.

<sup>57</sup> The "Indochinese" category includes Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese despite great historical, ethnocultural, linguistic, and religious differences between the three groups. During their large waves of immigration to Canada from 1978 to 1982, they were identified as "Indochinese" because Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam previously belonged to French Indochina between 1887 and 1954. The term, "Indochinese," has gradually been deserted because of its colonialist connotations. See Dorais's *The Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese in Canada*.

their interpreters, their annotators and paraphrasts, across the confusion of their new life” (67). These responsibilities create “[s]uch power in children” (67). Tuyen occasionally abuses her linguistic power, making “a deliberate misrepresentation or two along the way” (68) to get what she wants.

Tuyen practices passive bilingualism, common in Canadian-born children (or those who immigrated to Canada at a very young age) who cease speaking Vietnamese although they understand it (Dorais, “Language Use and Adaptation” 62). Research indicates that a strong link exists between language and ethnic identity, though language is not necessary for ethnic identity. Phinney et al. conclude that ethnic language proficiency influences ethnic identity in adolescents from Armenian, Mexican, and Vietnamese immigrant families residing in the United States. Tuyen abandons the Vietnamese language with the hope of escaping her ethnic identity. For example, within the Saigon Pearl, the Vu family’s restaurant, “most of the customers spoke Vietnamese only. When she was little, Tuyen rebelled against the language, 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 . . . reprimanding people older than she to speak English. ‘English, English!’ she would yell at them” (21).

Despite Tuyen’s attempts to purge her Vietnamese ethnicity by abandoning the language, she (unconsciously) gravitates towards Vietnameseness. She maintains her Vietnamese name and when Binh introduces her to his Vietnamese girlfriend, Ashley, Tuyen scoffs at the Anglicanized name: “‘Ashley?’ Tuyen asked with an impolite curiosity. ‘Where’d you get a name like that? What’s your real name?’ ‘Hue,’ the girl

said defensively. ‘Well, nice to meet you, Hue.’ She looked at her brother, rolling her eyes” (143). Their dialogue opens up the debate on ethnic authenticity/falseness, a debate that bothers Tuyen despite her pretence at certainty in this instance. Coincidentally, “Hue” was the imperial capital city of Vietnam from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The city of Hue, located in central Vietnam, played a significant role in the civil war that induced Tuan and Cam’s emigration. Geographically, Hue divided the communist North and anti-communist South, and was the site of the 1968 Hue Massacre during the Tet Offensive, a major battle during the war. Binh’s girlfriend’s “real” name points to a region of the ancestral homeland. Indeed, ethnicity is often associated with a country or political state. After a series of in-depth interviews with first and second generation Vietnamese Canadians, Chan and Dorais conclude that “Vietnamese cultural identity thus cannot be divorced from some form of national identity” (np). Tuyen’s ambivalent feelings towards Vietnam as a geopolitical state manifest themselves in her hostility towards Ashley/Hue.

Tuyen’s understanding of ethnicity sometimes transcends national borders, however. For example, she justifies her creation of an artsy *lubaio*<sup>58</sup> – a traditional Chinese signpost – by claiming: “there’s some ancient Chinese-Vietnamese shit that’s my shit and I’m taking it” (16). A confused Carla asks Tuyen “But I thought you were Vietnamese?”, to which Tuyen testily replies “How long have you known me?” (16).

Tuyen refuses to align herself with one of the two countries. Her vexed relationship with

---

<sup>58</sup> Amy Harris’s project on the intersections of place and literature in the Toronto region incorporates the *lubaio* of Brand’s *WWALF*. Harris equates Tuyen’s signpost to the CN Tower, a contemporary Tower of Babel that symbolizes “the great gift the gods have given us – the gift of different tongues – of the great challenge and opportunity to learn to communicate across language, culture, and experience in this younger Babylon.” See <http://imaginingtoronto.blogspot.com/2006/03/imagining-toronto-torontos-tower-of.html>.

ethnicity is apparent in her response to Carla, for “[t]he words sounded dangerous in Tuyen’s throat. Carla had ventured into a sensitive place” (16).

In addition to language, Tuyen rejects Vietnamese food. Ironically, the Vu family is in the business of cooking and serving it. After years of eating the same dishes, Tuyen “developed a dislike for what was called Vietnamese food” (129). As a child, she resented her packed lunches consisting of minty soups and bean curd, wanting instead the food of “normal people” (129). Thus, her aversion to Vietnamese food results from overexposure and ethnic stigma in public settings such as school. Tuyen admits that “she only felt exposed in the restaurant when European clientele were present, and when the customers were Vietnamese or Korean or African or South Asian, she hated, then, the sense of sameness or ease she was supposed to feel with them” (130). The Saigon Pearl cannot function as a “home” for Tuyen although she is surrounded by family because she feels like a spectacle in the presence of white customers or like an ethnic “other” in the presence of various minorities.

Tuyen turns to stereotypical “white” food instead of Vietnamese food. Her “favourite food was potatoes, cooked any style, but mostly just plain boiled potatoes with butter . . . to her taste they were the most delicious things. She could eat potatoes any time of day or night, huge bowlfuls. Potatoes were perfect, neutral, and glamorous. Meaning not at all like her family” (130). If it were her choice, she would also drink gallons of milk, but “her stomach reacted violently to it. But she insisted on drinking it. Or now buying it at least. She thought of this violent response as something to be conquered” (130). Like most Southeast Asians, Tuyen is lactose intolerant. Her inability

to digest lactose, the major sugar in milk, is due to her shortage of a particular enzyme. Thus, many scientists consider lactose intolerance a genetically-based condition.<sup>59</sup> Tuyen cannot escape, or “conquer,” this aspect of her ethnicity (and by proxy, family).

She feels conflicted about Vietnamese familial customs. Kibria's field work indicates that Vietnamese American youth are disappointed about “the absence of open expressions of affection among Vietnamese family members, such as hugging and kissing, in contrast to the behaviors they had observed in ‘American families’” (*Family Tightrope* 152-53). In the Vu family, Tuan expresses his love with “a kind of gruff duty and care” (57). He and his wife “were parents in the way that they knew—dutiful, authoritarian, good providers” (124). Tuyen recognizes that her parents love her, though they express love in a way that she cannot fully appreciate: “her family did not embrace. They fed you, they clothed you, they fattened you, but they did not embrace. Yet they held you. With duty, with obligation, with honour, with an unspoken but viselike grip of emotional debt. Tuyen wanted no duty . . . Yet she wanted an embrace so tight, and with such a gathering of senses and touches. She wanted sensuality, not duty” (61). Most Vietnamese boat people fled war-torn Vietnam to provide their children with a more promising future. People like Tuan and Cam sacrificed everything from their finances to their lives for their family's potential prosperity in another country. Their love for their children seems robotic and excessively utilitarian rather than a source of emotional pleasure, which is what Tuyen desires. She does not derive such pleasure from her family, but from the city:

---

<sup>59</sup> The other school of thought is that lactose intolerance is an adaptive condition.

Everyone walking in the city was senseless. She loved that. Everyone escaping the un-touch of familiars and the scents of fatalism gathered in close houses. Familiarity was not what she wanted or what would make her feel as if she were in the world. It was the opposite. The alien touch of sidewalks, the hooded looks of crowds. She loved the unfriendliness, the coolness. It was warmer than the warmth of her family in Richmond Hill. (61-62)

The city offers Tuyen a sense of belonging, something that she does not feel in her parents' house. She is suspicious of Vietnamese culture because it promotes love as a duty: parents must always care and provide for their children.

Love is not a facile issue for Tuyen, who maintains a love-hate relationship with her family. Although Tuan and Cam do not necessarily love their lost son more than their other children, Tuyen and her siblings nonetheless feel that Quy siphons away a great deal, perhaps too much, of their parents' love. Tuyen often identifies "a surge of resentment for the boy" because he had "been an impediment to . . . to what? To things she no longer needed, had never needed, but observed as missing" (60; original ellipsis). The Vu children's "culture was North American despite their parents' admittedly ambivalent efforts to enforce Vietnamese rules, and in North American culture, they knew it was *de rigueur* to love children equally and for children to claim that love as a right" (125). The reverse, however, does not hold. North American culture does not promote the same degree of filial piety, a Confucian value, that Tuan and Cam expect from their children. As a child, Tuyen considered her parents "incompetent" and wished that they were "similar to some perfect parent she had in mind who was not Vietnamese and for whom she did not have to translate the world" (127). Later in life, while meditating on her own longings for her *lubaio* art installation, Tuyen realizes that she

wants “another family . . . all along she had wished that her family was different” (151). Despite such an unsettling realization, Tuyen recognizes that “her parents had a vulnerability that she had known for as long as she could remember, and it made her feel protective of them” (127). As a teenager, after she would complain to Carla, Oku, and Jackie about her freakish family, Tuyen would “feel slightly disloyal” (48). Her contradictory feelings towards her family coincide with a pattern that Kibria notices in Vietnamese American youth. These youth may rebel against traditional Vietnamese customs, but there is “an abundance of evidence to indicate the continued importance of familial ties for young adults” (*Family Tightrope* 161).

Despite Tuyen's repeated attempts to emotionally and physically extract herself from her family, she cannot. For example, when she moves out of her parents' Richmond Hill house at the age of eighteen, she insists: “I didn't leave the family . . . I just have to be on my own” (57). Tuyen is strongly committed to her family, but simultaneously wants to make “a different life for herself” and “no longer [be] bound by the smallness of family” (61). Although the overpowering nature of family can sometimes be mitigated through time and space zoning within a house, “it seems undeniable that the physical design of contemporary mass housing creates a restrictive and somewhat inflexible locale, even for the nuclear family for which it was designed” (Munro and Madigan 117). Tuyen leaves the locale, but not the family. Her understanding of family differs from that of her parents, who chastise her regularly: “How you think a family works? Same house, same money, same life” (57). However, she does not want her parents' life, which is shaded by an “overwhelming sense of regret that Tuyen had fled. It would descend on her

if she spent any length of time at the house in Richmond Hill or in the too-long presence of any of the family” (268-69). Instead, she wants freedom. One of the pressing issues in *WWALF* is whether one can attain a sense of freedom without divorcing family. Tuyen learns that she is always bound to her family in some capacity. In fact, “[n]one of them could see themselves without the others . . . There was an invisible string between them beyond the pull of family as Tuyen knew it” (268). Family values are central to Vietnamese culture (Kwak and Berry 153), and Tuan and Cam attempt to inculcate such values in their children starting from a very early age. Although Kyunghwa Kwak and John Berry’s field work indicates that individual interests are beginning to take precedence over familial interests for Vietnamese Canadian adolescents, family remains a powerful force in the adolescents’ lives. Kibria’s study confirms that young Vietnamese Americans consider “the distinctive features of Vietnamese family life as what set them apart as a group in the United States” (*Family Tightrope* 166). Although a concerted push by Vietnamese Canadian youth for a more democratic family structure has been underway for some time now (see Chan and Dorais, and Kibria), the Vietnamese family has survived despite migration, albeit in a modified form.

The family also persists despite migration in *Certainty*, though Thien tests the extent to which a family can retain its cohesiveness while existing transnationally. In this text, the major threat to family is not intergenerational conflict like in *WWALF*, but physical distance between family members. Family ties hold, however, despite multiple displacements. Thien’s focus on family does not explicitly intersect with issues of ethnicity and culture, but such intersections are extremely important in diaspora studies.

Cultural theorist Ien Ang – ethnically Chinese, Indonesian-born, and raised in the Netherlands – grapples with the idea of “Chineseness,” a “de-centered center” (231) based on a common Chinese culture and identity. Because Ang’s parents spoke different dialects of Chinese, they communicated to each other and to their children in English. Therefore, she does not “possess the linguistic and cultural capital that is generally recognized as authentically Chinese” (236), but is still interpellated as Chinese due to her appearance. She argues that “[t]he idea of being part of a race produces a sense of kinship and heredity” (239), but insists that (Chinese) diasporic subjectivity “must be grounded in explicitly disorganic, hybrid, and synthetic notions of identity and community, not in some cozy, familial notion” (241).<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Thien features various types of diasporic families in *Certainty* whose members are related through biology, friendship, and familiarity.<sup>61</sup> In fact, there has been a push in kinship studies to de-center biology (Peletz 348). This trajectory emerged in part from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s “insistence that we examine the structural significance of ties of marriage and alliance, especially the ways in which they link descent units of various kinds. This move from descent to alliance helped reorient the study of kinship” (Peletz 350). An adequate descriptor of these various renditions of family – whose members are linked through biology, friendship, and familiarity – is “a space-time system” (Laing 4).

Laing’s notion of family as a space-time system signals Einstein’s theory of special relativity that brings together space and time into a four dimensional arrangement

---

<sup>60</sup> Here, Ang is in agreement with Paul Gilroy’s observations on African diasporic communities.

<sup>61</sup> The best example of a connection based on familiarity is the relationship between Gail and Ani, two women who never meet, but know of each other through Matthew.

called “spacetime.” Thien’s interest in Einstein’s theories is apparent as *Certainty* contains numerous references to his research. According to Einstein, when a star reaches the end of its life, it collapses under its own gravitational force and creates a “black hole” that exerts such a massive amount of gravitational pull that nothing, including light, can escape. At the centre of a black hole, the laws of physics – regarding space, time, matter, and energy – do not apply. Theoretically, if one were to pass through the centre of a black hole, one would enter a different spacetime, perhaps the past or future, or an entirely new universe (*Einstein Online*). Ultimately though, human beings are trapped within spacetime, or as Laing defines it, family.

Transnational kinship is a major theme in *Certainty* and exemplifies the “space” element of Laing’s definition of family as a space-time system. He posits spatial relations within families as “internalized as ‘near’ or ‘far’, ‘together’ or ‘divorced’” (4). In *Certainty*, families are not always “nuclear,”<sup>62</sup> but often nebulous, incorporating distant relatives, friends, and friends of relatives. All of the characters in *Certainty* are connected in some way – or in Einsteinian terms, every object exerts some gravitational force on all others – which produces a familial “web” (Laing 6) that spans across the globe.<sup>63</sup>

According to Kibria, the family is often neglected in scholarly conversations on

---

<sup>62</sup> The “nuclear” or “multi-generational” family is the most traditional structure consisting of mother, father, and their children, all of whom live under a single roof.

<sup>63</sup> A web is a highly appropriate metaphor for family and satisfies Ien Ang’s assertion that diaspora communities – “families” – must be considered “synthetic” entities. A web is synthetic in that it is created (and often repaired as well as re-created). It is not necessarily symmetrical or strong and is comprised of “threads,” an image that Brand and Thien use to describe familial relations. See pages 85 and 92-4 of this thesis for a discussion of the “thread” in *WWALF* and *Certainty* respectively.

globalization (“Globalization and the Family” 137).<sup>64</sup> She pushes for an understanding of “the family as a critical mediating structure of globalization . . . [because] families respond to the economic and other dislocations of globalization in a variety of ways, striving to ensure the survival of its members. These strategies are not simply responses to globalization but also constitute it, shaping its emerging scope and character” (“Globalization and the Family” 138). In *Certainty*, “global” families expand and contract continuously.

The Lim family – comprised of Matthew, Clara, and Gail – remains intact despite tensions within it: Matthew’s orientation towards his past in Sandakan and Gail’s propensity for travel problematize the family’s cohesiveness. Although Matthew is never entirely “here” – in the present and in Canada – and Gail is regularly “there” – in another country pursuing school or work – the Lim family survives. Time apart does, however, strain the family. After living in Europe for a decade, Gail returns “[h]ome to the house on Keefer Street,” her parents’ abode. The narrator notes that “[w]hen they sat down to dinner, she felt as if she and her parents were traveling across a vast field, coming to meet one another” (200). Distance creates difficulty, but not devastation for the Lims.

Matthew’s other family – comprised of Ani and Wideh – is highly unconventional. Ani and Wideh live in another continent and do not maintain contact with Matthew, and although Ani insists that she and Matthew “will always be attached”

---

<sup>64</sup> Kibria’s working definition for globalization comes from Anthony Giddens, who defines it as follows: “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (qtd. in Kibria 137).

(243), their attachment is severely hindered by distance.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, a strong emotional attachment exists between them, and to a lesser extent, between Matthew and Wideh.

By proxy, Gail feels attached to Ani, her father's first (and enduring) love. While Gail is on business in the Netherlands, she seeks out Sipke, Ani's husband, in order to learn more about her father's past. Gail's trip activates a number of new kinship links of varying intensity: Gail and Sipke maintain contact via email after Gail returns to Vancouver; Gail learns of her half-brother, Wideh, but never has the chance to meet him because she dies shortly thereafter; and Ansel and Sipke correspond via email regarding Gail's death. These relationships are possible because of modern technological advancements in communication. In this age, diasporic family members can correspond through the internet (email, instant messaging, webcams, and microphones), telephone, and (express) postal service. Modern technology makes communication much easier and faster, binding together diasporic communities while simultaneously underscoring distance and the lack of physical connection.

Ani's family is highly unconventional and transnational. As an orphan, she does not have access to an immediate family: her mother dies during labour (along with the child) and her father dies during the war. Ani lives in an orphanage for one month before one of her mother's cousins, Mas, finds and claims her. Ani lives with Mas's family temporarily and then departs for Tarakan,<sup>66</sup> partly to fulfill her mother's wishes:

---

<sup>65</sup> The adage "absence makes the heart grow fonder" applies to Matthew and Ani's relationship, though both parties involved are aware that they will never reconnect.

<sup>66</sup> Although Ani seems content enough with Mas's family in Sandakan, "she wonders what it would be like to leave here, finally, to travel to Tarakan" (148). See chapter two on Ani's transnational disposition.

Before she died, her mother had told her that she might find other family in Tarakan, in the Dutch East Indies, after the war. She asked Ani to promise her that she would go back one day, if she could. There were uncles, aunts and crowds of cousins. Ani said that she imagined a row of houses, each one opening to welcome her, each face a reminder of her mother's. When the war was truly over here in Sandakan, she would keep her promise and travel back to her family[.] (41)

These removed relatives act as links to Ani's deceased mother. In addition, family and "home" overlap entirely. Ani embarks on a return voyage to her distant relatives, her mother's "home(land)." In Tarakan, Ani lives with her uncle, Bashir, for a brief period of time. Subsequently, she travels to Ujung Padang, then to Pontianak, and finally to Jakarta.

In addition to her biological family, Ani gains another family that is based upon friendship. On the boat from Pontianak, she meets Saskia Dertik, "born in the same year as Ani" (142). The emphasis on this relatively mundane fact (traffic between Pontianak and Jakarta was intense during this period, so the chances of meeting someone of the same age were high) highlights Ani's discovery of a kindred spirit. Ani remembers how "Saskia and her family had welcomed her into their lives" (142). The Dertiks become Ani's adoptive family. Oddly enough, Saskia's husband, Siem, "reminds Ani of her father, and this resemblance both pains and steadies her. Their family is a mirror of Ani's own, the mother and father whom Ani carries in her memory, the little girl who was once so treasured" (143). Ani engages in what Laing calls "family projection" or "externalization." He states that after a child internalizes the family system, "[t]his 'family' set of relations may be mapped onto one's body, feelings, thoughts, imaginations, dreams, perceptions; it may become scenarios enveloping one's actions,

and it may be mapped onto any aspect of the cosmos. The whole cosmos may become mapped by a family scenario traceable to the prototypical 'family' set of relations and operations" (18). Although she experiences many different forms of kinship, Ani projects her dominant perception of the family – comprised of father, mother, and daughter – onto the Dertik family.

Siem's insights on space illuminate the theme of transnational kinship. He tells his daughter and Ani's son<sup>67</sup> "about space in the universe, how it stretches, collapses and folds" (144). These elementary lessons in cosmology seem to be inspired by Einstein's theories. Diasporic families inhabit space and are therefore governed by spatial physics. They undergo stretching (when members are separated from one another), collapsing (family disintegration), and folding (when members seek for and/or maintain ties with one another). Displacement is not entirely negative, however, since Ani meets her husband, Sipke, in Jakarta.

Sipke was always "the restless one" (243) in his family: "[e]ach of his three brothers had married, moving out of his parents' farmhouse and into homes of their own, but Sipke had a longing to see the world" (228). A family can never remain static. Sipke's three brothers establish families of their own and in doing so, expand and transform the "original" family. However, they remain within the Netherlands. In contrast, Sipke expands the family nexus by traveling the world as a war photographer. Like his wife, Ani, he assuages his transnational spirit despite his mother's attempts to

---

<sup>67</sup> These two children are raised within a communal family setting in which Saskia, Siem, and Ani act as the "parents."

“persuade him to come home” (229).<sup>68</sup> While living in Jakarta with Ani, Sipke receives letters from his mother describing “their [family members’] lives and the lives of his brothers’ families” (241). These letters have a powerful impact on him: “If he closed his eyes did he still see the wide sky, the tumult of the clouds? He reread the letter again and again, as if through it he could enter the life he had once known” (241). The interrogative mode and the conjunction “as if” suggest the narrator’s doubt regarding the ability of language to recreate the past. In addition, this episode demonstrates how transnational kinship is not necessarily a self-perpetuating network. People within such families must make the effort to maintain ties with one another. Ani recognizes her husband’s homesickness and remarks that it “must be difficult . . . Being so far away from your family” (243). He seems to exist within a different spacetime, in Jakarta with Ani and Widch, while his biological family is in the Netherlands. Sipke attempts to enter the “original” spacetime by living vicariously through his mother’s letters.

The members of a transnational family are emotionally and perhaps biologically connected to one another although they live in different locations. In *Certainty*, Thien treats these transnational familial connections as threads.<sup>69</sup> This metaphor resonates with Aihwa Ong’s notion of “flexible citizenship,” which she applies to Hong Kong businessmen – “astronauts” – who work in China but attain citizenship elsewhere. The

---

<sup>68</sup> Sipke tries to justify his need to travel: “How could he explain it? He needed to see things for himself, to know what he was capable of” (228). His words bear a resemblance to Tuyen’s justification for moving out of her parents’ Richmond Hill house. After telling her father that she needs to be on her own, he dismisses the idea with “On your own for what? What is out there?” to which she responds, “I don’t know, Bo [“Dad”]. That’s just it, right? I don’t know” (58). Sipke and Tuyen are concerned with “knowing,” with discovering themselves and their world. Such a desire entails a painful break from the parents.

<sup>69</sup> This metaphor also appears in *WWALF* in relation to the Vu family members’ connection to one another. See page 85 of this thesis.

transnational connections that these “astronauts” maintain to people and places correspond to flexible “threads” or elastics.<sup>70</sup> In *Certainty*, Thien demonstrates how these “threads” can only stretch so much before they snap. For example, when Matthew leaves Sandakan (and by proxy, Ani), the “thread” that binds him to his land (and lover) snaps: “As the plane rose higher, the thread that connected Matthew to the town grew taut, stretching, until it finally gave way” (55). Although Matthew maintains an emotional connection to Sandakan and Ani, its tangibility disintegrates when he departs. Although Ong addresses the limitations with her concept of flexible citizenship, Thien supplements it even further with a disclaimer that flexibility has a breaking point.

Thien also illustrates the connection between Gail and Ansel using this thread imagery. For example, on the night of Gail’s death, Ansel speaks on the phone with her: “Neither he nor Gail had wanted to hang up the phone, and so they continued talking, though her voice seemed to fade in and out, a thread he kept losing” (94). The thread between them expands and contracts frequently because of Gail’s profession as a radio documentarian who must travel the world in pursuit of stories; however, the thread snaps that night with Gail’s death.

For Gail and her mother, these threads are partially composed of familial love. While meditating on her relationship with Ansel, Gail realizes that “this is what love was . . . a line, a thread that she could follow, eyes closed, leading her out from the solitude of her mind” (190). The thread counters solitariness via familial love, in this case, between

---

<sup>70</sup> Ong discusses the families of these “astronauts”: “[Chinese] family regimes have become more flexible in both dispersing and localizing members . . . [with] the business traveler as an ‘astronaut’ who is continually in the air while the wife and children are located in Australia, Canada, or the United States, earning rights of residence” (127).

lovers. Clara feels similarly. When Gail dies, Matthew is overcome with grief. Clara invests hope in the “thread that would bind the two [herself and Matthew], and show him the way forward” (131). For Matthew, the pain that results from Gail’s death is mitigated by Clara’s love. This familial thread is his life line. In *Certainty*, connections to persons are just as significant as those to places. A transnational lifestyle seems more viable if one has access to familial love.

Time is the second component of Laing’s definition of family. He states that within families, “a *temporal* sequence is *always* present” (4). That is, one’s childhood experiences, which usually transpire within a familial framework, inform one’s future family life. Familial temporality is governed by what Laing terms “projection” or “mapping”:

Each generation projects onto the next, elements derived from a product of at least three factors: what was (1) *projected* onto it by prior generations, (2) *induced* in it by prior generations, and (3) its response to this projection and induction . . . There is always a projection or a mapping of one *set* of relations onto another *set* of relations. These are relations in time as well as space. In this type of projection or mapping, the *temporal* sequence may be retained or altered. (77-78)

In *Certainty*, Matthew grapples with temporal sequencing after departing Sandakan. Even his educational pursuits reflect his fixation on temporality: “Matthew had started a degree in civil engineering, but a year shy of completion, he had given in to his longing and transferred to the history department” (125). Matthew can handle history – a study of the past, present, and future – theoretically, but not realistically in terms of his own life. Temporal sequencing operates cyclically within the Lim family since Matthew’s and Clara’s pasts are projected onto Gail. In fact, the text opens with a quotation by Einstein

that addresses temporality: “[T]he distinction between past, present, and future is only an illusion, however persistent.” According to Einstein, there is no difference between these three demarcations of time, which actually blend into one another and fall under the general rubric of “time,” the fourth dimension of his spacetime model. Indeed, Matthew’s and Clara’s “pasts” become Gail’s “present,” which in turn influences Ansel’s “future.” As Einstein warns, however, the distinction between the past, present, and future feels extremely real, so it is difficult to think outside of this established linear temporal system.

The past is a major theme in diaspora narratives, and Matthew’s past continues to haunt him in the present. Ani tells Matthew when she ends their relationship that “what we wanted is not possible [now] . . . our parents would not wish us to be bound by the past” (174). However, diasporans are bound by the past, regardless of whether or not they want to be. In an interview with Laura Atkins, Thien reveals her stance on the past in terms of memory: “Of all the gifts that our parents give us, one of the most wonderful and mysterious is that they give us the example of their own lives. They show us how the past, present, and future might unfold in a single life; [and] how we are shaped by memory” (np). Indeed, in *Certainty*, Gail inherits her parents’ past. However, its status as a “gift” is highly suspect. After all, her parents’ past is painful and therefore, they refuse to burden her with it: “She knew so little about their lives. Privacy, her parents believed, was sacred. For as long as she can remember, she wanted to save them” (212). This inheritance becomes more of a responsibility to do something rather than a “gift.” Jack Reynolds summarizes Jacques Derrida’s theory on the gift:

[T]he logic of a genuine gift actually requires that self and other be radically disparate, and have no obligations or claims upon each other of

any kind. He [Derrida] argues that a genuine gift must involve neither an apprehension of a good deed done, nor the recognition by the other party that they have received, and this seems to render the actuality of any gift an impossibility. (np)

In theory then, Gail's inheritance of her parents' past cannot be a "gift" because they receive her recompense in the form of a desire to help.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" – a phenomenon in which children inherit their parents' past – complements Laing's concept of generational projection.

Hirsch states:

[P]ostmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. (22)

According to Hirsch, children can "remember" their parents' traumatic past despite not having lived through it or even having an awareness of it. The past can remain unspoken, yet somehow insert itself into the children's psyche. As a child, Gail desperately wants to mitigate her parents' sorrow, but "what sorrows? She did not know" (212). Gail never hears her parents discuss the past, and when she asks them about it, they withhold information from her (56). However, she senses Matthew and Clara's malaise and "knows, has always believed, that there is a secret that has colored her life, her childhood" (259). In fact, she not only inherits her parents' past, but also their diaspora consciousness.<sup>71</sup> As Laing would say, she is an "image" of her father and mother (77).

---

<sup>71</sup> See chapter two for more on Gail's transnational spirit, a variation of diaspora consciousness.

Inheritance operates at all levels of a family tree, not just from the “first” to “second” generation.<sup>72</sup> Gail’s father, Matthew, inherited his parents’ past. For example, while grieving over Gail’s death, he “remembers the gentleness of his mother’s hand in his hair, how when she stepped back from him, the imprint remained, a weight, a memory against his skin” (19). Matthew is marked by memory as his skin bears traces of his mother. She has inscribed herself – her past – onto his body. Also significant is how the memory is described as “a weight,” which suggests that it is a burden.

The text does not focus as closely on Matthew’s mother as it does on his father. Matthew’s father also leaves an indelible impression on his son, “liv[ing] on in his mind, a presence that shaped his thoughts” (134). Matthew’s father attempts to erase the past: “When the British surrender began, his father had gone methodically through the drawers, discarding the remnants of their previous lives . . . When he came to the postcards, he ripped them up . . . the pieces scattering on the carpet” (50). The postcard pieces represent the family’s fragmented transnational lives. Although the pieces are discarded, the history they summarize does not vanish as easily. Matthew remains a transnational figure, similar to his father, who “was Matthew’s age [10], [when] he had traveled alone, by ship, from China to Malaya, and onwards to North Borneo . . . He had become a man who could be at home in any place in the world” (49-50). These worldly travels cultivate a sense of cosmopolitanism in Matthew’s father, who becomes a “citizen of the world.” Amanda Anderson provides a useful definition of cosmopolitanism: “In

---

<sup>72</sup> This thesis assigns these categories of “first” and “second” to the two main generations featured in *Certainty* with an awareness that “first” and “second” are arbitrary depending on one’s reference point in the family tree.

general, cosmopolitanism endorses reflective distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity . . . it [cosmopolitanism] is defined against those parochialisms emanating from extreme allegiances to nation, race, and ethnos" (267). One can only speculate about which particular traits filter down from one generation to the next. Matthew does not seem to be able to locate "home" anywhere, unlike his father, who felt at "home" everywhere. Meanwhile, Gail resembles her paternal grandfather in her transient attitude. The past transgresses geographical and generational borders in *Certainty*, moving from Matthew's parents to Matthew to Gail.

When Gail discovers Sipke's letter announcing Ani's death, Gail embarks on a recovery project of Matthew's past, pursuing his unspoken memories all the way to the Netherlands. This is an example of what Thien describes in an interview with Ian McGillis as "timelines intersect[ing]" (np). Gail's and Matthew's timelines have crossed as she has immersed herself in her father's childhood. This subplot resonates with the ideas of modern physicists like Einstein, about whom Clara reads in a magazine article. They argue that "if one traveled fast enough, time would bend, and one person's past could theoretically become another person's future" (118). This idea of time as non-linear, capable of "bend[ing] backwards on itself" (17) directly opposes "the progressive nature of historical time" (Ferguson 177-78). Time does not always move forward in the novel, but it moves backwards, or even stops for some characters. In this, Thien demonstrates how conventional paradigms of time are insufficient in understanding diasporic sensibility.

While she is in the Netherlands, Gail learns more about Ani, a name that carries “a meaning, a weight” (259) between Matthew and Clara. Gail “held on to the memory [of Ani] as if it were a touchstone, something that could anchor her” (259). The memory of Ani anchors, grounds, and ultimately acts as a “home” for Gail. In other words, Gail is oriented towards her father’s homeland, figured in the memory of Ani.<sup>73</sup> However, Gail knows nothing about Ani other than the photographs that Sipke shows her. Hirsch states that “[p]hotographs, ghostly revenants, are very particular instruments of remembrance, since they are perched at the edge of memory and postmemory, and also, though differently, between memory and forgetting” (22). Photographs of Ani mediate between Matthew’s memory and Gail’s postmemory. In fact, photographs are a significant motif in *Certainty* – Sipke is a war photographer, Wideh is a photojournalist, and Ani is a photo developer in Jakarta and packs photographs of her Sandakan home when she departs – because they represent a moment or person of the past. Sipke’s photographs of Ani are devoid of context, however, so Gail must construct the memory of Ani, just like a diasporan constructs the homeland. This episode in the text establishes Gail as a removed diasporan who returns to her paternal homeland, figured in Ani. As Stuart Hall contends regarding the African diaspora,

[t]he original ‘Africa’ is no longer there. It too has been transformed . . . We must not collude with the West which, precisely normalizes and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the primitive, unchanging past . . . It [Africa] belongs irrevocably for us, to what Edward Said once called an ‘imaginative geography and history’ . . . Our

---

<sup>73</sup> While speaking to her father on the phone, Gail teasingly asks with whom he imagines dancing. Matthew does not divulge much, only telling his daughter that “I always danced with the same person. In Sandakan, when I was young. But she died a long time ago.” When they hang up, “something in her [Gail’s] mind seems to stop and catch, a word, a name, hovers on *the edge of her memory*” (207; emphasis added). Ani partly comprises Gail’s postmemory.

belongingness to it constitutes what Benedict Anderson calls 'an imagined community'. To *this* 'Africa', which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can't literally go home again. (231-32)

Indeed, Gail does not travel to her father's actual homeland of Sandakan. Instead, she visits the Netherlands, the colonial country that ruled Indonesia and half of Malaysia (the other half of Malaysia was ruled by the British). In this, Thien demonstrates how colonized subjects must encounter the colonial "homeland" in order to confront and come to terms with the past. It is also significant that Gail's colonial encounter occurs at an isolated and rural area of the Netherlands rather than at the urban centre. She is involved in that significant colonial moment of "first contact," arriving at an area that has not yet felt the impact of modernity. Sipke's house is located in an area that is steeped in the past.

Tuyen also exhibits postmemory in *WWALF*. Hirsch elaborates on postmemory, proposing that it

characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated. I have developed this notion in relation to the children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences. (22)

Tuyen is inundated with her parents' romantic stories about pre-Civil War Vietnam, but Tuan and Cam are mute about their terrifying escape from the communist regime.<sup>74</sup> The Vietnamese diaspora of the mid 1970s belongs to the victim tradition marked by

---

<sup>74</sup> If captured, boat people faced severe penalty from the communist regime. If they managed to escape from Vietnam, boat people then faced terrible travel conditions and possibly Thai pirates, who would ransack the boat for valuables and rape (sometimes kidnap) women.

catastrophic origins, Tuan and Cam's migration is laced with the loss of their son, which makes their dispersion doubly traumatic. Tuyen buckles under the weight of her parents' past: "she hated knowing that they came from a real moment of devastation" (64).

However, her father "had never told her the whole story. And certainly never how he felt. She had merely overheard, here and there, snippets of conversations. She had made sense out of nonsense. She comforted herself that it was just their usual sparring" (59). As Hirsch states of second-generation children, Tuyen does not fully understand nor can she recreate her parents' trauma. She attempts to make "sense out of nonsense" by assuring herself that it is her parents' nature to argue. Ignorance, even if it is self-imposed, is bliss.

Tuyen attempts to rid herself of postmemory by moving out of her parents' house.

She moves out

when she couldn't bear overhearing any more. She not so much overheard as sensed, since her own understanding of Vietnamese was deliberately minimal. She'd only been able to gather in fragments . . . the story that haunted them; the one that made her mother insomniac. The story about the beautiful boy Quy, the child they had lost in the South China Sea while fleeing Vietnam. (64-65)

Tuyen is highly attuned to her parents' sadness, a feeling so pervasive that she is compelled to leave their house.

At times, Tuyen's artwork reflects her postmemory. For example, she considers "mount[ing] an installation of the characteristics of her family, if only she could imagine the science with which to do it. It would be a hundred boxes of varying sizes made of a transparent translucent material floating in a room, suspended by no known element" (126). According to Tuyen's envisioned installation, her family exists outside the realm of scientific logic. The highly complex Vu family, represented by one hundred boxes of

varying sizes, stays afloat – survives – somehow. Tuyen also imagines that “[t]he floor of the room would be water, and she would walk through the room bumping into the boxes, which would not be discernible to the naked eye. As she collided with the boxes, things would fall out, spikes and keys and mouths and voices” (126). The water in her installation gestures to the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean that Tuan and Cam crossed during their journey from Vietnam to Canada.<sup>75</sup> As she walks through the room, however, she cannot avoid colliding with the invisible boxes. In other words, Tuyen will always encounter familial issues during the course of her life. She accidentally spills the boxes’ contents – opens multiple Pandora’s boxes – and is wounded by “spikes,” presented with “keys,” and hears “mouths and voices.” She unintentionally inherits her parents’ past in this envisioned installation, but in such a way that the past is only a set of fragments that she must construct.

Tuyen’s vexed relationship with her biological family prompts her to turn to another family – her friends. Brand offers an unconventional family that departs from the biological tradition and instead, is comprised of close friends.<sup>76</sup> Some anthropologists have started to avoid “the artificial separation of kinship from friendship (and other social ties)” and have situated “the long-neglected topic of friendship within the anthropological gaze” (Peletz 361). In *Certainty*, “families” or kinship networks exist transnationally, while in *WWALF* the second-generation “family” exists on a local level. Ironically,

---

<sup>75</sup> Diana Brydon discusses Brand’s use of “oceanic imagery” in relation to Quy. See “‘A Place on the Map of the World’: Locating Hope in Shani Mootoo’s *He Drown She in the Sea* and Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*,” 105.

<sup>76</sup> *Certainty* does feature a strong neighbourhood community comprised of Ansel and Gail’s close friends and neighbours. In fact, they all attend a dinner hosted by Matthew and Clara on the six month anniversary of Gail’s death. Together, like a family, they celebrate Gail’s life and reflect on how much she is missed. However, the friendship-based family is less pronounced in *Certainty* than it is in *WWALF*.

Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie are drawn to one another because they share similar familial experiences. The second-generation youth are prone to

bringing each other messages from the realms of their families and poring over these messages like found jewels, turning them over in the hand and listening to the sounds of them as they clinked on each other. Now that they were older, the details of their families [sic] lives loosened on their tongues, becoming fantastic when they lay together on the ratty couch at Tuyen's, examining them. (128)

Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie negotiate their biological familial experiences within a familial setting based on friendship. They create a family of their own, turning to one another for the emotional support that their biological families fail to provide. Tuyen confesses that “[s]he didn't mind caring for people who were not her family—it was so much easier; they actually did not expect it and were more than grateful for it. With other people you could begin from the beginning, together you could create your own forces, your own stories” (128). Tuyen emphasizes that her preference for this rendition of family is couched in its ability to begin anew. Among her family of friends, Tuyen does not inherit a traumatic past.

Love also exists between the friends, though it is much different than the love that circulates within the Vu family. Tuyen finds that among her friends, “[l]ove was easier, it was unexpected, pure . . . They took each other as gifts” (128). Unlike biological families in which members are expected to love and care for one another, friendships are less demanding. Brand suggests that “gift-giving,” in Derrida's sense of the term, is more viable between friends than family members.

In both texts, a dramatic turn of events “unifies” the family, though the consequences are neutral at best and damaging at worst. In *WWALF*, Binh miraculously

locates Quy, an event that should restore the Vu family, but instead, strains it further. When Binh informs Tuyen of the news, she feels “a tingling of things coming apart” (296). Upon meeting her long-lost brother, Tuyen reaches for him and remarks that “[h]e felt like nothing, a ghost” (298).<sup>77</sup> Indeed, his absent presence had been haunting the unhomely Vu household for years. In addition, however, the man in front of Tuyen is not the brother she had envisioned. She aptly notes that she and her family members were “all transfixed in the past, but he had been living . . . She wanted to ask him, Who are you?” (298-99). Tuyen foresees him as a “disappointment” (307) to her parents, and wants to save them from that.

Quy is an uncanny “ghost” (298) that returns to the Vu family.<sup>78</sup> A haunting experience that is uncanny rather than simply terrifying can yield positive effects. If a specter is both unfamiliar and familiar (altered, yet still recognizable), the haunted individual(s) must confront some important issues: the specter’s previous form, how it changed, who made it change, why it changed, and how to proceed. This interaction can lead to some degree of resolution and transform debilitating melancholia into “a melancholic agency” (Butler 468). Indeed, Tuyen notes how “[i]t was all well and good to have a tragic story in the past, but what if it returns? What if it comes back with all it has stored up, to be resolved and decided, to be answered” (301). Quy’s return has the potential to allow Tuan and Cam to come to terms with their anxiety regarding the past.

The Vu family does not experience a happy reunion. Quy’s recovery agitates Tuyen, who “saw it only as binding her closer. Not that she hated her family. She just

---

<sup>77</sup> She again refers to Quy as a “ghost” on page 301 and then as an “apparition” on page 302.

<sup>78</sup> See chapter one for a discussion on Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny.

didn't want to be in their everyday life. But now she had been drawn back into it . . . on the other hand it could be good. No skeletons, no ghost. The universe restored" (304).<sup>79</sup> This happy restoration does not occur because Quy is probably beaten to death just minutes before meeting his parents. Even if he were to survive, however, the narrator is highly skeptical regarding his ability to deliver happiness to the Vu family.

In *Certainty*, Gail's discovery of the existence of her half brother strengthens her understanding of her parents' past. She is neither hurt nor angry by this discovery, but awed (261). Later, she asks Sipke if Wideh had ever tried to find her father (274), a question that indicates her contemplation of familial unification. Sipke responds: "I thought, after Ani died, that he [Wideh] would [try to find Matthew]. But I don't believe he ever did. He put all his energy into his work, into his photographs. His love for his mother was so great, you know, I think he wasn't ready to let anything interfere with the memories he had" (274). Similarly, Matthew does not attempt to reconnect with Wideh after they meet for the first and only time. Wideh is just a young boy at the time, and is ignorant of Matthew's identity as his father. Matthew admits to Ani during this family reunion that "[p]erhaps he had suspected all along [that Ani had had their child], perhaps he had pushed the knowledge away, he no longer knew" (282). Nonetheless, Matthew parts from Ani and Wideh and never sees them again, though he thinks of them (mostly Ani) often. The Lim family does not require Wideh's presence in order to be whole or complete. In fact, Thien debunks the notion of familial wholeness, proposing that

---

<sup>79</sup> Recall Laing's assertion that "the preservation of the 'family' [as a system] is equated with the preservation of self and the world" (14).

families contain gaps and appendages. Wholeness or completion connotes a static state of being, but the family is a dynamic and ever-changing system in *Certainty*.

In *WWALF* and *Certainty*, the family undergoes great stress during and following dispersion, but it remains intact, though significantly altered. The first-generation characters resist familial changes more in *WWALF* than in *Certainty*, but familial changes occur nonetheless. Thus, the texts present the family as a highly dynamic system. In addition, the first-generation characters project their pasts onto the second-generation characters. This projection operates in an unspoken, almost telepathic manner such that the second-generation children become what Laing would call “images” of their parents. However, the children are not *mirror* images of their parents. The two generations differ significantly in a variety of ways, especially in their approaches to “home.” However, the diasporic past is a “trait” that is passed down and therefore, the second-generation children may also be considered “diasporans.” Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblances” reconciles this definitional glitch. According to him, certain traits are passed down from parents to children. A single, core feature may not exist in all generations of a family. Instead, “a complicated network of similarities, overlapping, and criss-crossing” (np) occurs within families. In *WWALF* and *Certainty*, only some aspects of the diasporic past filter down. The second generation exhibits some characteristics that lend it that diasporic face, but it is not identical to its predecessor. Through an exploration of the family, Brand and Thien alter the complexion of the diasporic face.

## Conclusion

*WWALF* and *Certainty* present “home” as a contradictory space that can be alienating and/or welcoming, restricting and/or liberating, traditional and/or contemporary. The term “home” is capacious, encompassing divergent meanings. Such meanings often depend on the inhabitants, who maintain a symbiotic relationship with “home.” Some of the first-generation characters such as Tuan and Cam in *WWALF* and Matthew in *Certainty* resist changes to “home.” Their children, however, contest meanings of “home” that have been defined by the white hegemony and/or by their parents’ history. The second-generation characters subscribe to a more fluid definition of “home” because of its liberating potential. In fact, some of them even adopt “homeless” lifestyles. At times, however, they betray a longing for stability and certainty within “home,” just like their parents. For example, Tuyen criticizes the rootless quality of Tuan and Cam’s Richmond Hill house and Gail always returns to her Vancouver abode despite the lure of travel. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard “asserted that childhood encounters with (and relations to) domestic space are seminal, and prior to any psychological or psychoanalytical understanding” (Boughey 235). Indeed, the texts suggest that “home,” or a sense of belonging, is a psychological necessity independent of age, class, gender, culture, and ethnicity. This desire for “home” is not absolute though, since the second-generation characters’ approaches to it frequently change.

For the first generation, pathological “homelessness” results from dispersion. After their departure from the homeland, Tuan and Cam in *WWALF* and Matthew and Ani in *Certainty* engage in a continuous project to (re)locate “home,” to achieve a sense

of belonging. The second-generation characters detect their parents' painful past and fractured relations to "home." In fact, the children inherit their parents' (unspoken) history. Thus, the "homelessness" that the second-generation characters exhibit is a variation of that exhibited by their parents. In other words, some aspects of "diaspora consciousness" are passed down to successive generations. However, Brand and Thien do not indicate for how many generations diaspora consciousness will be transmitted.

The inheritance of the past is inextricably linked to the themes of family and kinship. In each text, inheritance reaches an ambiguous conclusion. *WWALF* closes with the partial unification of the Vu family as Binh locates Quy; however, Quy is probably beaten to death just minutes before meeting Tuan and Cam. Once again, the biological family system is severely ruptured. In addition, Brand does not allude to another generation of Vus that will inherit the past. However, she does gesture towards other conceptualizations of family that are based on friendship rather than genetics. Critics such as Kit Dobson and Diana Brydon read the text optimistically despite such a devastating conclusion. They believe that the second generation can survive and pass on its legacy. For Tuyen's generation, the past may be transmitted horizontally (with friends) rather than vertically (with relatives).

It is more difficult to feel as optimistically towards the conclusion of *Certainty*. Gail and Ansel do not have any children, so the future of inheritance is unclear. The final pages of the text focus on the primary first-generation character, Matthew, who struggles with extreme grief: "Ani in a park on the other side of the world, the words his father could not say, the remembered voice of his daughter" (305-06). He wonders, "how am I

to live now, when all is said and done and grief must finally be set aside” (305).

Matthew's future is highly uncertain, but one can find solace in Clara, who takes a share of his grief and promises to carry it within her heart (129). For Thien, familial love is the only certainty.

Anthropologist Margaret Trawick closely studied an extended Tamil family consisting of twenty members and produced the text, *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family*. Her enabling definition of kinship can be applied to the families in *WWALF* and *Certainty*:

Kinship . . . was much more than just ‘social structure,’ a stable architectural framework through which generations passed. It was also a form of poetics, a set of biochemical equations, a web of deep-seated longings. It could hardly be a ‘structure’ at all, for protean variability in form was intrinsic to it, and it was composed of those things that structural anthropologists are always trying to get away from—unique and unpredictable human personalities. (7)

Brand and Thien deftly portray contemporary Canadian diasporic families in which members exhibit “unique and unpredictable personalities” and maintain “deep-seated longings” for “home,” love, and certainty.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Amanda. "Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity." *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. 265-89.
- Anderson, Kay J. "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77.4 (1987): 580-98.
- Ang, Ien. "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm." *boundary 2* 25.3 (1998): 223-43.
- Anthias, Floya. "New hybridities, old concepts: the limits of 'culture'." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24.4 (2001): 619-41.
- Bannerji, Himani. "Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation." *Unhomely States: Theorizing English Canadian Postcolonialism*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. Peterborough: Broadview, 2004. 289-98.
- Bougey, Joseph. "One Widower's Home: Excavating Some Disturbed Meanings of Domestic Space." *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*. Eds. Gerry Smith and Jo Croft. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2006. 228-46.
- Brand, Dionne. *What We All Long For*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2005.
- Brydon, Diana. "'A Place on the Map of the World': Locating Hope in Shani Mootoo's *He Drown She in the Sea* and Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*." *MaComère* 8 (2006): 94-111.
- Butler, Judith. "Afterword: After Loss, What Then?." *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. London: University of California Press, 2003. 467-74.
- Caruth, Cathy. "Introduction." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 3-12.
- Chan, Kwok Bun and Louis-Jacques Dorais. "Family, Identity, and the Vietnamese Diaspora: The Quebec Experience." *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 13.2 (1998): 285. *AcademicOneFile*. Gale. McMaster University Library. 20 September 2007 <<http://find.galegroup.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE>>.

- Cheng, Anne Anlin. "The Melancholy of Race." *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. London: Oxford UP, 2002. 3-34.
- "City of Toronto's Immigration and Settlement Portal: Toronto's Story." *City of Toronto*. 10 January 2008 <[http://www.toronto.ca/immigration/toronto\\_story\\_imm.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/immigration/toronto_story_imm.htm)>.
- Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302-38.
- Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
- . "Solid, ductile, and liquid: changing notions of homeland and home in diaspora studies." *University of Oxford Department of International Development QEH Working Paper Series*. October 2007. 30 January 2008 <<http://www3.qeh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/qehwp/qehwps156.pdf>>.
- Davis, Chuck. "A Brief History of Greater Vancouver." *The History of Metropolitan Vancouver*. 2004. Harbour Publishing. 20 May 2008 <<http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/story.html>>.
- Dobson, Kit. "'Struggle Work': Global and Urban Citizenship in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 31.2 (2006): 88-105.
- Dorais, Louis-Jacques. "Language Use and Adaptation." *Uprooting, Loss and Adaptation: The Resettlement of Indochinese Refugees in Canada*. Eds. Kwok B. Chan and Doreen Marie Indra. Ottawa: Canadian Public Health Association, 1987. 52-64.
- . *The Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese in Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2000.
- . "Vietnamese Communities in Canada, France and Denmark." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11.2 (1998): 107-25.
- Einstein Online*. Max Planck Institute for Gravitational Physics. 10 July 2008 <<http://www.einstein-online.info/en/elementary/index.html>>.
- Ferguson, James. "Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development." *Global Shadows*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. 176-93.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." 1919. *Professor Laurel Amtower's E-Texts*. 2 November 2007 <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html>>.

- Giulianotti, Richard and Roland Robertson. "Recovering the social: globalization, football and transnationalism." *Global Networks* 7.2 (2007): 144-86.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. 222-37.
- Harvey, David. "The utopian moment." *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 133-96.
- Hawks, Andy. "Future Culture Manifesto: A Manifesto on the Here-and-Now Technocultural (R)evolution." *The Cyberpunk Project*. 10 November 2003. 20 May 2008 <[http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/future\\_culture\\_manifesto.html](http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/future_culture_manifesto.html)>.
- "Hip Hop." *The Encyclopedia of New York State*. Syracuse UP. 30 June 2008 <<http://www.syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu/encyclopedia/entries/hip-hop.html>>.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Hirsch, Marianne and Leo Spitzer. "'We Would Not Have Come Without You': Generations of Nostalgia." *American Imago* 59.3 (2002): 253-76.
- hooks, bell. "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance." *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990. 41-49.
- Kibria, Nazli. *Family Tigh trope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- . "Globalization and the Family." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 32.2 (2006): 137-39.
- Kibrieb, Gaim. "Citizenship Rights and Repatriation of Refugees." *International Migration Review* 37.1 (2003): 24-73.
- Kwak, Kyunghwa and John W. Berry. "Generational differences in acculturation among Asian families in Canada: A comparison of Vietnamese, Korean, and East-Indian groups." *International Journal of Psychology* 36.3 (2001): 152-62.
- Laing, R.D.. *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.

- Long, Lynellyn D. and Ellen Oxfeld. "Introduction: An Ethnography of Return." *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*. Eds. Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 1-15.
- "Ludwig Wittgenstein." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 8 November 2002. 10 September 2007 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/#Lan>>.
- Ma, Sheng-mei. "Immigrant Schizophrenic in Asian Diaspora Literature." *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. 40-60.
- Mackey, Eva. "Managing the House of Difference: Official Multiculturalism." *The House of Difference: Cultural Difference and National Identity in Canada*. New York: Routledge, 1998. 50-70.
- Maitland, Leslie. "The Queen Anne Revival Style at Home in Canada." *The Queen Anne Revival Style in Canadian Architecture*. Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1990. 29-39.
- Malkki, Liisa. "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495-523.
- . "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11.3 (1996): 377-404.
- Masschelein, Anneleen. "The concept as ghost: Conceptualization of the uncanny in late-twentieth-century theory." *Mosaic* 35.1 (2002): 53-69.
- McKibbin, Molly. "The Possibilities of Home: Negotiating City Spaces in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*." *Journal of Black Studies* 38.3 (2008): 502-18.
- Min, Susette. "Remains to be Seen: Reading the Works of Dean Sameshima and Khanh Vo." *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. London: University of California Press, 2003. 229-50.
- Moran, Joe. "Houses, Habit and Memory." *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*. Eds. Gerry Smith and Jo Croft. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2006. 27-42.
- Munro, Moira and Ruth Madigan. "Negotiating Space in the Family Home." *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Ed. Irene Cieraad. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1999. 107-17.

- Ong, Aihwa. "The Pacific Shuttle: Family Citizenship, and Capital Circuits." *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. 110-38.
- Peletz, Michael G. "Kinship Studies in Late Twentieth-Century Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 343-72.
- Pennartz, Paul J. J. "Home: The Experience of Atmosphere." *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Ed. Irene Cieraad. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1999. 95-106.
- Phinney, Jean S. et al. "The Role of Language, Parents, and Peers in Ethnic Identity Among Adolescents in Immigrant Families." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 30.2 (2001): 135-53.
- Rée, Jonathan. "Cosmopolitanism and the Experience of Nationality." *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*. Eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998. 77-90.
- Reynolds, Jack. *Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)*. 2006. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at La Trobe University. 10 July 2008 <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/d/derrida.htm#SH7a>>.
- Rose, John. "Contexts of interpretation: Assessing immigrant reception in Richmond, Canada." *The Canadian Geographer* 45.4 (2001): 474-93.
- Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1.1 (1991): 83-99.
- Seiler, Tamara Palmer. "Multi-vocality and national literature: Toward a post-colonial and multicultural aesthetic." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31.3 (1996): 148. *FindArticles.com*. 21 September 2007 <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3683/is\\_199610/ai\\_n8741501](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3683/is_199610/ai_n8741501)>.
- Tölölyan, Khachig. "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment." *Diaspora* 5.1 (1996): 3-36.
- Thien, Madeleine. *Certainty*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006.
- . "Multiple Solitudes: Madeline Thien and the Search for Certainty Interview (with Ian McGillis)." *AELAQ* 19.9 (2006) 25 November 2007 <<http://www.aelaq.org/mrb/feature.php?issue=17&article=497&cat=1>>.
- . Pacific Rim Voices Interview (with Laura Atkins). 25 November 2007 <[http://www.papertigers.org/interviews/archived\\_interviews/mthien.html](http://www.papertigers.org/interviews/archived_interviews/mthien.html)>.

- Thomas, Mandy. "Crossing over: the relationship between overseas Vietnamese and their homeland." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 18.2 (1997): 153. *Academic OneFile*. Gale. McMaster University Library. 20 September 2007 <<http://find.galegroup.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE>>.
- Trawick, Margaret. *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- UNHCR: *The UN Refugee Agency*. 10 January 2008 <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>>.
- Vertovec, Steven. "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22.2 (1999): 447-62.
- Vidler, Anthony. "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime." *Assemblage* 3 (1987): 6-29.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. "'A Tough Geography': Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada." *Unhomely States: Theorizing English Canadian Postcolonialism*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. Peterborough: Broadview, 2004. 277-88.