

# Figures of immigrants and their descendants in postmodern Canadian literature: problems with dislocation; collapse and reconstruction of identity

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**FIGURE IMIGRANATA I NJIHOVIH POTOMAKA U POSTMODERNOJ  
KANADSKOJ KNJIŽEVNOSTI: PROBLEMI S IZMJEŠTENOSTI; KOLAPSO I  
REKONSTRUKCIJOM IDENTITETA**

**(FIGURES OF IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS IN POSTMODERN  
CANADIAN LITERATURE: PROBLEMS WITH DISLOCATION; COLLAPSE AND  
RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY)**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis three postmodern works of Canadian literature are going to be analysed: a selection of poems from *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* by Margaret Atwood published in 1970, a selection of short stories from *Tales from Firozsha Baag* by Rohinton Mistry published in 1987, and the novel *What We All Long For* by Dionne Brand published in 2005. What connects these works is the depiction of immigrant experience in Canada at three different points in contemporary Canadian history – mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 2000s, respectively. At the focal point of each work are characters preoccupied with their sense of displacement in Canada – the country of immigration in the case of Atwood’s and Mistry’s characters, and the country of both immigration and birth when it comes to two generations of Brand’s characters. These characters inevitably question their identities in the wake of culture clashes; they are often being discriminated against on the grounds of their more or less prominent “otherness”; and they are trying to build a meaningful life and identity in the new land.

In her poetry collection, Atwood places a real-life figure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writer Susanna Moodie in the role of the protagonist. The real-life Susanna Moodie published two books about her own experiences as a new immigrant in Canada – *Roughing it in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*. In the first book she describes her life as an early English settler in the Canadian wilderness, while the second book is an account of her and her family’s later life in a more urban setting. Atwood uses both books as the hypotext<sup>1</sup> for her collection of poems in which she builds her own character based on Susanna Moodie. Atwood’s Susanna Moodie will be referred to as “the Moodie persona” throughout the analysis. The second part of the analysis will concentrate on a few selected short stories from Mistry’s collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. The selected stories offer a picture of 1970s Canada from the perspective of Parsis from India, immigrants struck with a culture shock upon coming into contact with the Western way of life, whose difficulties range from meeting basic human needs to struggling with the concept of their identity which had never been a stable point in their lives, and now it

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Genette distinguishes hypotext from hypertext thus: “By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary. ... This derivation can be of a descriptive or intellectual kind” or “it may yet be of another kind such as text B not speaking of text A at all, but being unable to exist, as such, without A, from which it originates through a process I shall provisionally call transformation, and which it consequently evokes more or less perceptibly without necessarily speaking of it or citing it” (Genette 5).

is even further undermined in the new surroundings. Finally, Brand's novel offers a slightly different set of characters – second generation Canadians of various descents on the crossroads between tradition and modernity. The protagonists are trying to cope with their country's multiculturalism and with the baggage their ancestry and parents bring along, and that struggle prompts them to question their identities. The characters of protagonists' parents, i.e. the first generation of immigrants, are also going to be briefly discussed with the goal of providing a wider context for the analysis of the second generation. The analysis of the aforementioned texts will try to determine what an immigrant status in Canada might mean for an individual on a cultural, psychological and political level at different points in time and with regard to the characters' race, ethnicity, class and social status.

## **2. POSTMODERN AND POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT**

The terms “postmodernism”, “postmodernity” and “postmodern” have from their coinage been hard to define unequivocally because of their ambiguous nature and quite limitless scope of intertwinement with many academic fields. The terms refer neither to a fixed historical period nor a movement or genre with rigidly outlined set of rules, but can rather be understood as denoting a state of mind, a set of distinctive features, a shift towards different ways of thinking, perceiving and creating in comparison with the ones applied during the period commonly known in the West as modernism. Since the shift did not happen overnight and equally in all walks of life, it is impossible to determine the exact beginning of its presence, but it is safe to say that the change started to be noticeable on a bigger scale approximately around the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century in areas such as architecture, sociology, philosophy, arts and literature. Simon Malpas states that “it was in the late 1970s, the 1980s and the early 1990s that the terms ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernity’ became pervasive in European and North American culture” and that “postmodern art and culture are simply surface phenomena generated by much more far-reaching social, political or philosophical transformations that have taken place in the modern world” (Malpas 5, 7). Postmodernism, therefore, can be understood as a multi-layered reaction to the fast-changing Western world in the period after World War II. Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian author of seminal theories on postmodernism, observes that “the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are

in fact ‘cultural’” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 2). In other words, postmodernism sought to see the world in a new light through questioning firmly established truths and dogmas which were up to that point taken for granted. In the world of literature, the “de-naturalization” Hutcheon writes about presupposes that literary texts are being reanalysed and rewritten, existing ideas and occurrences are once more being turned over in the hands of intellectuals, in order to gain new insights and interpretations which had previously slipped under the radar. To achieve that goal, postmodern authors have developed or applied various writing styles and techniques, the most relevant one for this analysis being historiographic metafiction and the intertextuality it applies in forming literary works. The term “historiographic metafiction” was coined by Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s, who describes it thus:

[Historiographic metafiction] overtly ‘de-doxifies’ received notions about the process of representing the actual in narrative – be it fictional or historical. ... It implies that, like fiction, history constructs its object, that events named become facts and thus both do and do not retain their status outside language. This is the paradox of postmodernism. The past really did exist, but we can only know it today through its textual traces, its often complex and indirect representations in the present: documents, archives, but also photographs, paintings, architecture, films, and literature. (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 78)

Historiographic metafiction, according to Hutcheon, strives to point to the fact that history is accessible only through narratives which have been shaping it according to dominant ideologies; which in the Western context presupposes ideologies associated with the notions of Western superiority. Therefore, many authors (Western and non-Western) decided to rewrite old literary works in the light of postmodern theories and in the form of historiographic metafiction, with the goal of illuminating problems and questions which were previously often resolved in alignment with the aforementioned dominant ideologies. Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* can be categorized as historiographic metafiction not only because it is based on older texts (Susanna Moodie’s 19<sup>th</sup> century sketches on life in the Canadian bush), but also because it observes a colonial experience through the postcolonial lens and applies postmodern literary techniques to deconstruct problems posed in the original texts.

Having touched upon the subject of the notions of Western superiority, one of the most important aspects of the postmodern period has to be mentioned – the emergence of postcolonial theory and literature, which significantly contributed to the aforementioned rethinking of the dominant narratives. Edward Said published *Orientalism* in 1978, thereby propelling the development of an array of post-colonial theories within the frame of which have come into focus concepts and terms which sought to shed light on the inadequate and discriminatory ways the West interpreted the East (Orient) throughout history. Said states the following: “The Orient that appears in *Orientalism*, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire” (Said 202, 203). The West had over the previous centuries formed the notion of the East primarily through the lens of literature, myths and legends, and therefore built a romanticized idea of it. Additionally, in the light of racist theories from the 19<sup>th</sup> century about alleged superiority of the white race (206), the East had become firmly established in the minds of the West as inferior and therefore deserving of conquest:

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. ... Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over. (207)

Closely connected to Said’s theory is the term “other”<sup>2</sup>, which originates from Freudian theories and is defined by Ashcroft et al. as follows: “The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ ... as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view” (Ashcroft et al. 154-155). Similar rhetoric was being applied to the people of non-Caucasian descent living in the (former) colonies, among which is Canada. In the following chapters, the analysis will show how the rhetoric of orientalism and “otherness”, manifests in relation to the figures of immigrants depicted in the three literary works at three different points in Canadian history.

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<sup>2</sup> Postcolonial theory makes a distinction between the terms “other” and “Other”, although some critics use them interchangeably. According to Ashcroft et al., “other” refers to the entities colonized and marginalized by the imperial centre, while „Other“ represents the imperial centre itself which serves to the colonized side to identify itself as the “other” (Ashcroft et al. 155-156).



Apropos Canadian history, Linda Hutcheon summarized it in the following way: “The history of Canada, as it was taught to most of us, is the history of immigration. It also happens to be the history of European colonialism and of native displacement and cultural erasure” (*Other Solitudes* 10). The beginning of European exploration of the American continent started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the land known today as Canada was first claimed by the French in 1535. Early 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the establishment of the colony New France, while the end of the century was marked by British attempts to take over the territory and turn it into a British colony. Smaro Kamboureli states that

the British and French colonizers saw themselves as settlers, as arriving in a land that was taken to be more or less empty. The presence, cultural difference, spirituality, and languages of the Aboriginal peoples, the people who live in what we now call Canada, were not seen as having any inherent value. The land they inhabited, and which they continue to inhabit, was deemed to be ready for the taking. (Kamboureli xxiv)

Such was the extent of the colonial sense of superiority that they failed to even acknowledge the existence of fully developed human societies found upon arrival in the newly discovered land, and let alone respect those societies as equally valuable, albeit different. Ashcroft et al. explain that “rules of inclusion and exclusion operate on the assumption of the superiority of the colonizer’s culture, history, language, art, political structures, social conventions, and the assertion of the need for the colonized to be ‘raised up’ through colonial contact” (Ashcroft et al. 37). The patronising attitude heavily resonates with Said’s theory of orientalist thought which pervaded Westerners’ notion of the East. Transferred to the Canadian context, the concept of orientalism can be applied to the relationship between Europeans and the Indigenous people since the time of the Europeans’ arrival onwards, as well as, by extension, to the relationship between the Europeans (namely the British) who over the centuries politically established themselves as the rulers of Canada, and all other immigrants to Canada, namely the non-Caucasian and non-Christian ones. The British who inhabited Canada at the expense of the Indigenous peoples during the country’s colonial period are mostly called “settlers”. Ashcroft et al. define the term thus:

Within colonial discourse, the settlers generally referred to are Europeans who moved from their countries of origin to European colonies with the intention of remaining. Increasingly the term ‘settler-invader’ has been used to emphasize the less-than-benign repercussions of such ‘settlement’, particularly on indigenous peoples. (193)

The term “settler” without the second part of the aforementioned compound resonates rather benevolently and as such does not do justice to the Indigenous peoples who had to suffer major negative consequences of European colonial ambitions. Also, Canada is often referred to as a “settler colony”, since the settler-invaders not only imposed power upon the Indigenous peoples, but became the majority which either marginalized or destroyed native societies and culture, sometimes even up to the point of erasure (193).

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century Canada became, according to Bryan D. Palmer, one of the richest colonies thanks to the abundant natural resources (Palmer 16). On the other hand, the people of Great Britain and Ireland were facing difficult times finding jobs in their birth countries due to fast population growth combined with many aspects of manual labour being replaced by machines. Therefore, many decided to emigrate to Canada and build a better life for themselves and their children, and once there, they were also referred to as settlers owing to their colonial background. However, Canadian wilderness, harsh weather conditions, vast spaces left unexplored, and encounters with the Indigenous people left the newcomers in a state of disorientation and dislocation. According to Ashcroft et al., the term dislocation refers to “the occasion of displacement<sup>3</sup> that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event”. It is “the phenomenon [which] may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location” and it “affects all those who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be ‘reinvented’ in language, in narrative and in myth” (Ashcroft et al. 65). It seems that, regardless of one’s social background and status, it is difficult to remain immune to the consequences of radical shifts as would be the case of a complete transfer of one’s existence into a new environment, an environment lacking familiar concepts and structures which usually facilitate identification with it. Identification, defined by Stuart Hall as “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal” (*Who Needs Identity* 16), is impossible to achieve because there are no shared characteristics with the new environment on which it could be built. Therefore, the new environment seeks an explanation of some kind; one has to interpret the new location and ascribe to it significance which would enable them to connect with it and consequently build within it a

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the analysis, the phrase “sense of displacement” will be used, since it will primarily refer to the characters’ overall feelings of non-belonging to the new surroundings.

life as valuable as the one left behind in the Old World. A phenomenon related to dislocation is the one which Northrop Frye, an influential Canadian literary theorist, calls a “garrison mentality”. Frye concludes that a garrison mentality is developed in

small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological ‘frontier’, separated from one another and from their American and British sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting. (Frye 225)

The fear which stemmed from everyday encounters with the unknown in the Canadian wilderness prompted the settlers to form close-knit communities in order to gain a sense of security as much as it is possible in such conditions. The results of such practice were secluded formations which did not allow proper acceptance of the new environment and eventual assimilation. The fear of “going native”, which Ashcroft et al. defines as “the colonizers’ fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs” (Ashcroft et al. 106), pervades the settlers’ Eurocentric worldviews not only throughout the colonial period, which will be shown in the analysis of Atwood’s work, but also in the postcolonial period (albeit in a different form), as observed in the analysis of Mistry’s work. The aforementioned concepts will be further explained and concrete examples of how they manifest will be given in each of the following analyses.

Over the following centuries people from all over the world, willingly or unwillingly, immigrated to Canada due to various reasons – economic, political, entrepreneurial, educational, etc. The immigrations gradually helped form a multicultural society Canada is known for today, although that does not automatically imply that immigrants were always universally welcomed to Canada. Linda Hutcheon reminds of some of the discriminatory practices carried out by the Canadian government throughout recent history – the Chinese head tax which for decades charged every Chinese person who wished to enter Canada, the deportations of the sick and poor at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the refusal to accept European Jews before the Holocaust, and many more (*Other Solitudes* 11). In the light of the civil rights movements which flourished across many Western societies during the 1960s, the Canadian Prime Minister from 1968 to 1979 Pierre Trudeau significantly contributed to the progress towards tolerance by adopting the official multicultural policy in 1971. According to

Melanie U. Pooch, the idea was that “the different pieces [people of different ethnicity, nationality, religion, culture, language etc.] remain recognizable and together form the whole picture of Canadian culture, society, and identity” (Pooch 83). The policy formally came into effect in 1988 through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act which advocated diversity and inclusiveness of all Canadians in all fields. However, the reality has been playing out somewhat differently, since the notions of “culture, society, and identity” in the Canadian context seem to be impossible to define unequivocally due to an abundance of contradictions and plural meanings. Identity is an ever-evading concept for a first or second generation Canadian who does not fit exclusively into only one box, but who is compiled of at least two cultural and historical contexts – the Canadian one and the one of their Old world. Stuart Hall claims that identities are “never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation” (*Who Needs Identity* 17). One’s identity is therefore a complex structure built through all the connections one has ever made with the world around them, as well as through one’s relation with the Other, i.e. through what one is not (17). Coming into contact with new environment or being a part of a visible minority prompts the protagonists of the three analysed works to question their own fragmented identities constructed through their own specific experience, within their own individual context. The goal of this analysis is to compare the three different contexts and see how the aforementioned postmodern and postcolonial concepts manifest in the construction of the three literary texts and characters, as well as to see the progress of each analysed character through the stages of rebuilding an identity – a sense of displacement resulting in the collapse of identity; reconstruction of identity; and reconciliation with the new identity.

### **3. THE SELECTION FROM *THE JOURNALS OF SUSANNA MOODIE* BY MARGARET ATWOOD**

#### **3.1. The background**

Susanna Moodie, a writer and the person who inspired Atwood's poems, arrived in Canada with her husband and child in 1832, during the immigrant wave called The Great

Migration of Canada. The Moodies were middle-class, unaccustomed to the life in the wilderness and hard work, so moving to a harsh environment such as the Canadian bush, in which they spent eight years, proved to be a challenging and at times crushing experience which compelled them to question the values, habits and standpoints which, up to that point, they had regarded as the norm. The Moodies were at times, although British and white, objects of wonder and rude intrusiveness, for which Susanna had little patience, and they were sometimes even looked down upon by the wary locals, mostly working class, who perhaps wanted to forestall being themselves discriminated against. Therefore, life in Canada also made them confront the reversal of their position of power. Susanna Moodie hopes in the closing chapter of *Roughing it in the Bush* that her sketches would give an objective account on the life in the bush and serve as a warning to the eager prospective immigrants, especially to the gentry and the ones of her own class, since they would inevitably find it harder to adapt than the working class.

Margaret Atwood, reading Moodie's texts from a temporal distance, offers her own perspective on Moodie's writings from a postmodern angle and in the postcolonial context. Atwood's motivation for a literary work such as this one lies in her living in Canada during the decades when it was becoming increasingly important to define Canadian identity. Kogila Moodley and Heribert Adam argue that

in the 60s, issues of national identity and the need to address inequalities loomed high on the list ... Very significant was the changed immigration regulations which removed and forbade previous discriminatory provisions limiting the entry of certain ethnic and racial groups. Subsequent concerns about Canadian identity gave rise to educational programmes to work towards the goal of fostering a national identity. (Moodley and Adam, 430)

According to Francis Fukuyama, national identity "consists of the stories that people tell about themselves: where they came from, what they celebrate, their shared historical memories" (Fukuyama 8). However, achieving that goal proved to be a difficult task for a multicultural country in which plurality of nationalities, ethnicities, religions and cultures pervaded every aspect of life. One way of trying to determine a national identity was looking into the past in order to see the foundations upon which the contemporary nation has been built. According to Judit Molnar, during the 1960s Atwood was under the influence of Northrop Frye who "tried to persuade young poets like her ... to make Canada 'the mythic

centre' of their imagination" and "thus Atwood starts out from history, from actual facts, documents and transforms them into a modern sensibility ... She uses the past to reflect on the Canadian present" (Molnar 127). Through writing about the experiences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrant Susanna Moodie, whom Molnar deems "an archetype of the Canadian immigrant" (127), Atwood explores the effects that immigration in the Canadian context might have on an individual's psyche and on forming an identity in alignment with one's new surroundings.

In the poems, Atwood is trying to incorporate both what Susanna herself communicated in the sketches, and her own interpretation which stems from, as she was quoted stating in Hope Jennings' article, "the gaps between what was said and what hovered, just unsaid, between the lines" (qtd. in Jennings 133). Jennings argues that "the gaps in Moodie's source texts articulate an overwhelming sense of the unmapped space that surrounds her during her time in the bush and the subsequent struggle to negotiate her relationship to the environment and its multiple inhabitants" (133). Atwood, on the other hand, takes those gaps and upon them builds her own hypertext within which she constructs the Moodie persona. Atwood selects events described in Moodie's source texts, such as daily menial work, close encounters with the Indigenous people and an outbreak of fire, to name a few, and in her poems translates them as the crucial points of the Moodie persona's transformation. Atwood also uses those points to exemplify postcolonial concepts which illuminate the problematic aspects of the colonial position from which the real Moodie wrote her texts.

The collection of poems *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*<sup>4</sup> is organized into three parts, or three "journals". Journal I is mostly based on the account of the real Susanna Moodie's first eight years in Canada, that is, the years spent in the bush. Journal II is inspired by Moodie's writings on life "in the clearings", after they moved to the town of Belleville. Journal III deals with the Moodie persona's old age and death, expanding beyond her death to the moment of Atwood's writing. The order of the poems for the most part chronologically follows the Moodie persona's life in Canada (which corresponds to the writer Moodie's life as depicted in her texts). The exceptions to the chronological order are those poems in which the Moodie persona dreams or reminisces about previous parts of her Canadian life. This analysis is going to be conducted and presented according to the stages of the Moodie persona's transformation – from the phase of initial sense of displacement which resulted in shattered

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<sup>4</sup> For this title the abbreviation "JSM" will be used in the source text brackets.

identity, to the complex process of rebuilding identity and the final stage of reconciliation with her new self.

### **3.2. The stage of identity's collapse**

The poems analysed in this section deal with the Moodie persona's first years in Canada, during which she experienced a significant distress upon confronting life in the wilderness. The opening poem of the collection is "Disembarking at Quebec", depicting the protagonist's arrival in Canada. She instantly feels that she sticks out in the new environment, so she tries to figure out if there is something wrong with her: "Is it my clothes, my way of walking (...) this space cannot hear" (*JSM* 11). From the very beginning the space is personified – in this case, it is shown to be deaf to the Moodie persona's potential requests or pleas; its quiet indifference refuses to welcome her. While other newcomers are enjoying the scenery and ecstatically celebrate, she feels differently: "The moving water will not show me / my reflection // The rocks ignore // I am a word / in a foreign language" (11). She seems the only one of the settlers who is able to see the nature's refusal to accept them – every item of the natural environment turns its back to them, as if protesting, as if sensing the threat they pose to the primordial which still permeates every inch of the intact, unconquered land. As for the last two lines, Erin Smith observes that Moodie "must learn the nonrational language of the wilderness in order to understand the new rules of existence" (Smith 79), otherwise she might not adapt at all. The civilized, advanced, European way of life built on logic and rationality is seen as the norm by the colonizers. However, the wilderness they encounter in Canada is a foreign concept to them which they are unable to comprehend. As Ashcroft et al. notices, "the words to describe the new place adequately cannot be found in the language brought with the early settlers, new terms must necessarily be invented" (Ashcroft et al. 65). Thus, the new place causes the emergence of the sense of displacement which, consequently, poses a threat to their, previously unshakeable, senses of identity.

The poem "Further Arrivals" depicts the journey of the settlers towards the wilderness. On their way they encounter Irish immigrants whose unrestrained conduct was also mentioned by the real-life Susanna Moodie in the original work in which she reveals her shock at them being "destitute of shame" (Moodie 99), offending her sense of propriety. In Atwood's poem, this scene seems to depict, from the perspective of the Moodie persona, the starting point of civilization's decline in the new world, after which they "entered a large

darkness” (*JSM* 12). Little by little, the masks are falling, threatening to reveal the monstrous inside them. “I need wolf’s eyes to see / the truth // I refuse to look in a mirror” (13). The tools she is equipped with are not going to suffice to deal with the new world. As Arnold E. Davidson says, “Since wolf’s eyes will not be uncovered by contemplating an Englishwoman’s frightened face, she ‘refuse[s] to look in a mirror.’” (Davidson 16). There is no point in looking in a mirror as the reflection she would find in it would only be a painful reminder of her incompetence, so she decides it is time for a different approach.

In the “First Neighbours”, Atwood refers to Moodie’s experience with people who surrounded her and her family in the beginning of their Canadian life. The lines “The people I live among, unforgivingly / previous to me, grudging / the way I breathe their / property, the air” (*JSM* 14) reveal that both sides are unrealistic to a point, as well as that they unconsciously incorporate colonial mind-sets, without even questioning its morality. The Moodie persona’s words “unforgivingly previous to me” point to her egocentric nature and colonial conditioning; she almost begrudges them the insolence of having arrived before her and therefore preventing her to claim the land, while in turn they despise the idea of sharing with the newcomers what they already “conquered”. Neither of them recognizes the fact that they are both only immigrants to the land of Indigenous people, whom they often underestimate, as it is visible in the following lines: “asked the Indian / about the squat thing on a stick / drying by the fire: Is that a toad? / Annoyed, he said No no, / deer liver, very good” (14). As Jennings observes, “Susanna misreads the object because she already misperceives the natives to be savages — just as she assumes that anyone living here who has had prolonged contact with the wilderness is less civilized — and thus likely to be found eating toads (also viewed as objects of disgust)” (Jennings 140). The Moodie persona holds prejudice against the Indigenous people whom she sees as “other”, which points to her sense of superiority rooted in her colonial background. Ashcroft et al. describes the colonial policy of superiority thus:

European colonization ... which accelerated in the eighteenth century and reached its apogee in the nineteenth, actively promoted or facilitated Eurocentrism through exploration, conquest and trade. Imperial displays of power ... and assertions of intellectual authority in colonialist institutions such as schools and universities, and through the civil service and legal codes, established European systems and values as inherently superior to indigenous ones. (Ashcroft et al. 84, 85)



When the whole dominant narrative works towards one goal, and its parts reinforce one another through every aspect of society (education, science, politics etc.), little space remains for re-analysing it. The Moodie persona at this point still does not have the experience and tools needed for the re-evaluation of her world views. The closing lines of the poem return to the Moodie persona's laments about language: "my damaged / knowing of the language means / prediction is forever impossible" (*JSM* 15). She is still struggling with the sense of displacement caused partly by her inability to adequately describe her new environment in the terms known to her, because that environment is completely different from anything she has experienced up to that point.

"The Planters" depicts the Moodie persona watching her husband and two other men as they work the soil and plant vegetables, as they "bend, straighten" (16). She contemplates thus: "I know / none of them believe they are here / They deny the ground they stand on // pretend this dirt is the future / And they are right. If they let go / of that illusion solid to them as a shovel // ... they would be surrounded, stormed, broken // ... as I am" (16-17). They suppress the reality and this illusion is everything they can hold on to at the moment, the work is the only "language" they know for now, which anchors them and enables them to survive from day to day, waiting for the future which they hope would bring meaning. The bending and straightening is not only a description of their work; it is symptomatic of the settlers' approach to the new land – it has to be bent, broken and subordinated in the manner of European colonization; it has to be conquered. Jennings argues that the Moodie persona, observing those men, "links this fantasized mastery over space to a model of temporality that allows humans a way of imagining that they can avoid the materiality of their being-in-the-world" (Jennings 142). The fantasy allows them to persist and focus on the future, while the Moodie persona is mentally trapped in the mute, undefined vastness of which she cannot make sense. Her feeling of isolation and the overall sense of her versus her surroundings indicate that she developed a "garrison mentality" in order to protect herself from the threats around her, both real and imagined ones. On the other hand, as Jennings concludes, she is starting to be aware of the settlers' actual position: "Susanna detects the settlers' flawed perception of nature, a perception that sees humans as separate from their environments and thus able to 'bend' and 'straighten' nature to their own liking and needs" (142). While the men still struggle to show dominance and refuse to accept defeat, the Moodie persona is slowly stepping out of the colonial mental frame.

In “The Two Fires” Atwood rewrites Susanna Moodie’s account of a summer fire near her house, and a fire that broke out inside the house one winter. During the first one, which can be understood as an attack by the wilderness on the unsuspecting and unprepared settlers, she seeks shelter in the house, concentrating on “form, geometry, the human / architecture of the house, square / closed doors, proved roofbeams / the logic of windows” (*JSM* 22). Smith notices that “Moodie's defence against the chaos of nature is all that is even, regular, closed, and explicable by rational standards” (Smith 79). The sensible organization of proper shapes, straight lines and overall conventional order gives an illusory comfort to her, acting as a safe haven where she can still keep a little bit of propriety from back home, because such an orderly system is the only one within which she can function. However, the second fire breaks out from within, from the stove in the house, forcing the Moodie persona and her children out in the snow. She concludes: “Two fires in- / formed me // (each refuge fails / us; each danger / becomes a haven) // left charred marks / now around which I / try to grow” (*JSM* 23). Wilderness is unpredictable as it is, and she does not trust it to begin with, but when the civilized, orderly system in the form of her house betrays her, she has nothing to hold on to because the foundations have once again been shattered, as well as her sense of identity. The only option is to try to overcome it by picking up the remains of her old self and turn them into a basis for metamorphosis.

“Looking in a Mirror” depicts the Moodie persona finally observing her image in a mirror seven years into the life in the bush. She has been physically altered by hard work and weather conditions, her outlines have grown harsher, and many changes in her appearance are represented by expressions connected to nature, such as bark, roots and twigs; as if she is now to a point entwined with nature and that encourages her to look in a mirror after so many years. The sense of displacement which was intensely present in “The Two Fires” and previous poems starts to gradually transform into the next phase of the Moodie persona’s journey towards new identity – by depicting the entwinement, Atwood suggests that by this point she has assimilated to the new land. Also, by employing the terms which usually describe nature to describe her protagonist, Atwood tries to convey the idea that the Moodie persona has appropriated the language of her surroundings which might help her to facilitate the process of rebuilding her identity. According to Ashcroft et al., appropriation refers to the ways in which “dominated or colonized culture can use the tools of the dominant discourse to resist its political or cultural control” (Ashcroft et al. 15). However, sometimes the term can refer to the process in which the dominant culture takes over an aspect of the dominated

culture and uses it as its own (15). That can be a problematic practice since it might include cases of a dominant culture not being marginalized for using aspects of a dominated culture, whereas the dominated culture is being marginalized for using those same aspects (which originally belong to it). Since the Moodie persona, despite her position in the new land, belongs to the dominant colonial culture, her act of appropriating the language of wilderness in order to describe herself is an example of the latter version of appropriation as described by Ashcroft et al. Additionally, Molnar notes that “after portraying her reflection in the mirror, she surpasses the visual image by transforming it into the description of her present state of mind, her struggle with searching for identity” (Molnar 128). That struggle can be seen in the following lines: “you find only / the shape you already are / but what / if you have forgotten that / or discover you / have never known” (*JSM* 25). After seven years in the wilderness, she has been transfigured both externally and internally, but she is still not sure what kind of a new form she has acquired and what is her current identity.

The poem “Death of a Young Son by Drowning” offers a few striking scenes and insights. The poem begins thus: “He, who navigated with success / the dangerous river of his own birth / once more set forth // on a voyage of discovery / into the land I floated on / but could not touch to claim” (30). As the Moodie persona’s son was born in Canada, it was all he knew and he did not have to go through a process of adaptation as his parents did; he glided smoothly and with little thought about all the things which were challenging for the Moodie persona. At this point she still does not feel at home in Canada, she cannot feel free to “claim” the land and call herself Canadian. While the toddler investigates his birth land, he accidentally slips and falls in a river which results in drowning. “They retrieved the swamped body // cairn of my plans and future charts / with poles and hooks / from among the nudging logs” (31). The Moodie persona saw her son as part of the reason she was enduring all the hardships in the new land – in order for him and his siblings to build a comfortable life in the “promised land”. His meaningless and premature death puts a stop on her dreams, but marks the beginning of the second phase of her adaptation. The poem closes with the lines “I planted him in this country / like a flag” (31), which powerfully and solemnly resonate at the end like her personal anthem. As her beloved son’s body becomes one with the land she had cursed and despised so many times, she cannot help but alter her emotions towards it, at least out of respect for it being her son’s final resting place. From the moment of his burial in the Canadian soil, she becomes irreversibly attached to it, and that bond lays the foundations for the reconstruction of her identity.

### 3.3. The stage of identity's reconstruction

In this stage the protagonist's heightened connection with the new land and the awareness of the undergone change help her step into the next phase of her development. "Departure from the Bush" sees the Moodie persona preparing to leave the wilderness with her family to go live in Belleville. She sees herself as the one "who had been erased / by fire" (*JSM* 26), which once again confirms the conclusions from "The Two Fires" and "Looking in a Mirror" – her old self has been thoroughly changed. She continues: "In time the animals / arrived to inhabit me // ... I was not ready / altogether to be moved into // ... I was not completed" (26-27). All the experience she had gathered while living in the wilderness at that point did build a base for her transformation, but all the ingrained values still prevailed and prevented her from acquiring a new form. The poem closes with her lamentation about the animals who unsuccessfully tried to inhabit her: "There was something they almost taught me / I came away not having learned" (27). Jennings sees in those lines "a sense of indefinable loss" (Jennings 145) felt by the Moodie persona, indicating her grief over the separation from the nature, because over the years she has built a relationship with it and assimilated to it. The endured hardships stirred her spirit, but failed to completely transfer her to the final phase of her mental progress. What she did make out of those eight years is at least awareness of there being something different, something out of the limits of her constrained notion of the world, and something possibly equally valuable. That awareness is another building brick in the complex process of self-reconstruction.

In "The Immigrants" the Moodie persona watches newcomers to Canada arriving after her, experiencing all that she has already gone through. "I see them coming / ... as they step on shore // the old countries recede, become / perfect, thumbnail castles preserved / like gallstones in a glass bottle" (*JSM* 32). As they enter and get to know the new world, their home countries become only a still memory, almost a utopian image free of imperfections and an idealized nostalgic place. The comparison with "gallstones in a glass bottle" might also symbolize a painful reminder of a past struggle which serves as a motivation to carry on in the new world regardless of how hard it might seem in the beginning. The Moodie persona continues her observations: "They carry their carpetbags and trunks / with clothes, dishes, the family pictures / they think they will make an order / like the old one" (32). Davidson notices that she "views the arrival of others far more complacently than her own earlier arrival was seen" (Davidson 18). She is wiser now; she has made peace with the inescapably painful process of initiation and she ceased to idealise the world around her. Finally, she completed

her own Way of the Cross while in the wilderness and she is more than ready to hand over the baton to the next round of sufferers.

“Dream I: The Bush Garden” is the poem which served as an inspiration for the title of Northrop Frye’s 1971 book called *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. In the book Frye introduces the concept of “garrison mentality”, the mentality which, according to him, heavily influenced the development of early Canadian literature. The phrase incorporates in itself a stark contrast – while “garden” is associated with an orderly and purposeful human-made structure, “the bush” is a synonym for wilderness. Therefore, a garden placed in the bush might translate as the settlers placed in the Canadian wilderness within which they form “garrison mentality” and remain within the boundaries of it while writing early Canadian literature. As for Atwood’s poem, the Moodie persona dreams about being back in the bush in her garden where she planted all kinds of vegetables and fruit. She is able to see bulbs and roots through the earth and everything seems full of life. However, when she tries to pick the strawberries, her hands glisten with red colour. She concludes: “In the dream I said / I should have known / anything planted here / would come up blood” (*JSM* 34). The imagery of blood might refer to the metaphorical “blood” the Moodie persona had to spill for her new country, whether in the form of sacrifice (the death of her children), or in the form of suffering while adapting to the new environment. Molnar argues that “in this phase she penetrates her psyche deeper and deeper; she enters her inner self formed by the wilderness which means for her to enter her own unconscious self” (Molnar 129). The Moodie persona is starting to acknowledge that the wilderness thoroughly affected her, which opens her up to re-evaluation of her colonial world views.

In “Dream II: Brian the Still-Hunter” the Moodie persona dreams about a man who used to visit her family while they were living in the bush. From the original text it is known that he was a settler from England who gradually turned alcoholic, which in combination with an awkward temper produced a man who lived a solitary life and did not like too much contact with other people. He told Susanna stories about his hunting habit, of which Atwood also writes in the poem: “He said to me: / I kill because I have to / but every time I aim, I feel / my skin grow fur” (*JSM* 36). The savage act of killing turns him into a beast from human perspective, but also makes him more aligned with the natural world. Jennings argues that “although a predator, Brian the hunter represents the ways in which the wilderness preys on humans and can become a place of madness. The forest infects him to the point that he desires to become one of the animals he kills” (Jennings 146). For the Moodie persona, he is a

representative of all the dangers which can happen if one consorts too much with the wilderness and lets it completely into their life – one can certainly go mad in her view. Kim Stringer concludes that “Brian epitomises the breakdown of the human/external world distinction that the Moodie persona has been experiencing in *The Journals*” (Stringer 174). Therefore, Brian represents a possible outcome of what it means to “go native” or “become bushed” (the phrase referring to the Canadian context), for he is a settler who has already crossed that boundary and has merged with the ways of the “other” side. For the Moodie persona, he is an embodiment of her fears and the direct connection with the duality which lies within her and of which she is afraid, and the experience of knowing him brings her another step closer towards the acceptance of her new self.

The poem “The Deaths of the Other Children” refers to the Moodie persona’s coping with the deaths of her young children. “My arms, my eyes, my grieving / words, my disintegrated children // Everywhere I walk, along / the overgrowing paths, my skirt / tugged at by the spreading briars // they catch at my heels with their fingers” (*JSM* 41). Smith notices that “the ambiguity of the construction makes no differentiation between the children and the briars. It is the buried children who have fingers and the briars that catch at her heels, but they have become one for Moodie” (Smith 81). This thought is a continuation of the one from “Death of a Young Son by Drowning” – the children’s deaths have accelerated the formation of her relationship with Canada and its nature, for their buried bodies have become one with the soil and with every footstep she is aware of their silent presence underneath, aware of how they have pinned her down to that new land to which she is now inextricably physically linked and which she is now almost forced to accept and love.

In the poem “Later in Belleville: Career”, the Moodie persona as an elderly person reminisces of the times when she was fairly poor, wrote poems and painted white fungi which she would later sell to tourists, mainly richer than herself. She contrasts it to the present day, describing her everyday rituals: “I sit on a stuffed sofa / in my own fringed parlour, have / uncracked plates (from which I eat / at intervals) / and a china teaset // There is no use for art” (*JSM* 47). The poem depicts how the wilderness has also changed her as an artist – before she created in order to make other people’s home comfortable and, of course, to make money. Now she is well-off and lives in a comfortable home full of classy ornaments, but does not appreciate it in the same way anymore. The categorical statement at the end can be interpreted as almost being at the verge of humorous, reminding one of life’s recurrent ironies. The wilderness and its representative “voice of knowledge” from “The Double Voice” took their

toll and deprived her of the noble enjoyments art can offer. Now, if she cannot find physical purpose of an object or a notion, she finds it hard to find its purpose at all.

In “The Double Voice” the Moodie persona, musing on her split self, says that “two voices / take turns using my eyes” (42). The voices are deeply contrasted but equally present in her mind. One is a refined voice of an English middle-class lady who “had manners / painted in watercolours / used hushed tones when speaking / of mountains or Niagara Falls” (42), while the other possessed concrete and more terrestrial knowledge devoid of any romantic illusions: “that men sweat / always and drink often / that pigs are pigs / but must be eaten / anyway” (42). After a long struggle, the wilderness has penetrated the Moodie persona and has become a permanent part of her character, whether she likes it or not. Kim Stringer argues that “the two voices ... represent two levels of consciousness: one, the voice of ‘manners’, artistic accomplishments ... and a Wordsworthian faith in the natural world; the other, the voice of ‘knowledge’, which knows that ... nature is Darwinian, red in tooth and claw” (Stringer 177). Stringer here leans on Margaret Atwood’s observations (presented in her 1972 book on Canadian literature named *Survival*) of how the representations of nature in European literature transformed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to Darwin’s theories from the romantic and idyllic depictions to the more realistic ones. Atwood argues that “most of the English immigrants were by that time safely in Canada, their heads filled with diluted Burke and Wordsworth, encountering lots and lots of nature” (*Survival* 50). Consequently, a discrepancy appeared between the notions of nature in their minds and the nature they encountered in Canada. As Atwood notes in analysing Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It*, Moodie was disturbed by the lack of correspondence between the two. Although she strived to preserve the romantic idea of nature in her texts, the everyday exhibitions of the real nature prevented her from doing so, which resulted in her “double-minded attitude toward Canada” (*Survival* 51). Atwood transfers that double-mindedness from Moodie to her own poems in which she builds the Moodie persona. The Moodie persona in Atwood’s “The Double Voice” has seen a close-up of nature many times and therefore is familiar with both its aesthetic and unpleasant aspects, so few surprises have been left for her. Smith concludes that “by this point, the animal nature of the wilderness that was previously present only in the landscape is also located within Moodie herself” (Smith 81). The Moodie persona has acquired a double voice which resonates of the one Moodie the author possessed. The lines “one saw ... / ... red leaves / the rituals of seasons and rivers // The other found a dead dog / jubilant with maggots / half-buried among the sweet peas” (*JSM* 42) Stringer comments thus: “Both voices observe

the process of decomposition and regeneration: the voice of the artistic imagination sees ‘the rituals of season and rivers’; the other voice sees the dead dog and the maggots. But both represent authentic modes of perception” (Stringer 178). The first voice romanticizes nature, while the other one sees it as it looks behind the curtain, warts and all. By acquiring this double voice, the Moodie persona starts to embody the doubleness which Linda Hutcheon calls “the essence of the immigrant experience” (*Other Solitudes* 9).

### 3.4. The stage of reconciliation with the new identity

The awareness of the doubleness within her transfers the Moodie persona towards the final stage of her metamorphosis. “Visit to Toronto, with Companions” depicts the protagonist’s visit to an asylum for mentally unstable people, namely women. Women on the first floor are calm and gloomy, but friendly towards the visitors. Women on the second floor are disorderly, “tearing off their clothes, screaming / to us they paid little attention” (*JSM* 50), and it seems their mental condition is far worse in comparison with the ones on the first floor. Stringer recalls Smyth's analysis: “Smyth argues that the women inhabiting the first floor are 'connected to Moodie's Old World Self', her bag of knitting in the opening poem linking her to the sewing women. Women on the second floor are ... women 'in the midst of their journey' ... tearing off their clothes they are like the immigrants who ‘threw off their clothes / and danced like sandflies<sup>5</sup>” (Stringer 178). The first three stanzas are another intertextual reference to Susanna Moodie’s original text in which she described her own visit to an asylum. However, in the fourth stanza Atwood adds the Moodie persona’s visit to the third floor of the asylum, which is not based on the previous text by Moodie the author. The third floor looks the most peculiar because it consists of elements from nature, such as hills and trees. The Moodie persona says “The landscape was saying something / but I couldn’t hear ... / They wanted me to go out / to where there were streets and / the Toronto harbour // I shook my head ... / the air / was about to tell me / all kinds of answers” (*JSM* 51). Her companions want her to leave that place and return to the city (civilization), but she wants to stay in order to hear what nature has to tell her. Erin Smith argues that at this point, the Moodie persona is finally ready to “learn the language of nature, nonrationality and madness” (Smith 82). If the poem is observed as the progress of the Moodie persona’ mental state, in the beginning she is in awe of nature, somewhat melancholic, but willing to cooperate in order to get through as

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<sup>5</sup> Stringer here references the lines from Atwood's poem „Further Arrivals“ from *Journal I*.



painlessly as possible. That stage can be aligned with the phase of dislocation upon arrival to a new place. After some time she completely grasps what it means to be an alien in the unknown land, so her mind enters the stage of bewilderment and panic, which can be linked to the phase of her identity's collapse. In the poem it is represented by the imagery of the disturbed women on the second floor. The third stage, represented in the poem as the third floor where personified nature communicates with her, is a stage of peace made with the world around her, the stage in which she accepts that she could learn much from that world if she only allowed it to teach her. Also, she does not want to go back to the civilized world as she realizes she would not fit there anymore since she has been changed by the new land. At this point she achieves reconciliation with the duality and the fact that her identity remains a place of ambiguity, because she still cannot and, as it will be shown later in the analysis, never will be able to unreservedly call Canada her home. Explaining the notion of doubleness, Hutcheon notices that, "caught between two worlds, the immigrant negotiates a new social space" (*Other Solitudes* 9). That space in between becomes the new reality to immigrants and it can be concluded that, consequently, the state of doubleness to them eventually becomes a state of normal.

"Thoughts from Underground" is the first poem written from the perspective of the dead Moodie persona. It opens with directly disclosed emotions: "When I first reached this country / I hated it / and I hated it more each year" (*JSM* 54), after which she proceeds to list the difficulties she had to face while in the bush. She continues: "Then we were made successful / and I felt I ought to love / this country / I said I loved it / and my mind saw double" (54). Once again, her split sense of self is confirmed and she accepts it as her reality. However, the part of her which allegedly loves the country seems forced and as if it sprouts exclusively from the feeling of obligation: "I constructed / desperate paragraphs of praise, everyone/ ought to love it ... // due to natural resources, native industry, superior / penitentiaries / we will all be rich and powerful" (55). Another instance of intertextuality is present here – "paragraphs of praise" are an allusion to the source text in which Moodie the author presents the advantages of Canadian life to her European audience. As for the Moodie persona, it seems that the quoted praise might only be an attempt to convince herself of the rightness of the decision to move to Canada. She concludes the poem with a warning that "it is still no place for an english [sic] gentleman" (55), again contradicting herself right after mentioning the lucrative benefits a settler might experience in the new land. Jennings notices that the aforementioned last line "holds several layers of irony but primarily indicates that the

settlers never truly brought ‘civility’ to the wilderness; rather, the wilderness brought out the barbarity of the English and their greed for ‘natural resources’” (Jennings 146). Considering that much of the Moodie persona’s praise for Canada boils down to the profit the settlers might have from it, the English colonial appetites have most likely increased even more upon coming into contact with the rich unclaimed land.

Atwood additionally expands ideas from the previous poem in the next one, “Alternate Thoughts from Underground”, strengthening and preserving the Moodie persona’s eternal dichotomy. Her elegiac lamentations come across as more powerful and sincere than the ones expressed earlier: “My heart silted by decades / of older thoughts, yet prays // O topple this glass pride, fireless / rivetted Babylon, prays / through subsoil / to my wooden fossil God // But they prevail / Extinct / I feel scorn but also pity: what / the bones of the giant reptiles / ... felt when scuttled / across, nested in by the velvet immoral / uncalled and armourless mammals” (*JSM* 55). She calls for the destruction of everything human-made, as she compares her feelings to the ones presumably felt by dinosaurs while they were dying out (if one imagines they were able to feel human-like emotions). She observes how “immoral” humans change the environment which she struggled so hard against but in a way grew to love and admire. The doubleness within her is again visible in the way she contradicts herself – while in the previous poem she praised industrial and urban development, here she advocates the preservation of the primordial.

The last poem of the collection is “A Bus along St. Clair: December”. The Moodie persona’s voice speaks from the contemporary world, i.e. from the point of Atwood’s writing. “It would take more than that to banish / me: this is my kingdom still” (60) are the opening lines, “that” referring to death. Although humans have over time built cities and covered the soil with concrete, her spirit cannot be evicted from that land, for she says: “I have / my ways of getting through” (60). Stringer says that “it appears as if the spirit of Susanna Moodie has become the poetic voice of Atwood” (Stringer 180), as if she never really abandoned this world but remains here to haunt it and, through Atwood as a medium, to tell her story. The Moodie persona continues: “I am the old woman / sitting across from you on the bus / ... out of her eyes come secret / hatpins, destroying / the walls, the ceiling // Turn, look down / there is no city / this is the centre of a forest // your place is empty” (*JSM* 61). Davidson comments the lines thus: “Wherever she looks the city vanishes, the forest reappears, and, in the last words of the poem, ‘your place is empty’, while hers is filled with all that she has recognized and reconciled” (Davidson 19). She remembers the city while it was still uninhabited piece of

land and she exposes the falsity of human-made world, deeming it a scam, a mask covering the real world of wilderness beneath. It seems that in the heart of civilization actually lies emptiness devoid of meaning, although each individual desperately tries to ascribe it to their counterfeit gods of material goods and luxury and social status. Also, in this poem the Moodie persona addresses the reader for the first time, and by employing that metafictional device, Atwood invites the audience (primarily the Canadian one) to engage with her protagonist's experiences on a more personal level – as fellow immigrants or their descendants who continue to build Canadian society and with whom, despite the temporal distance and different circumstances, she shares the sense of ambiguity and possibly a similar experience of the process of adaptation.

As far as formal characteristics of the poems are concerned, what stands out the most, apart from the fact that they are written in free verse, is the frequent use of enjambment, i.e. thoughts which start to form in one line and finish in the next without punctuation in between. The literary device often creates a feeling of hesitation to express thoughts in the way they were first imagined, which perfectly accentuates the atmosphere of the character's constant wariness and the struggle to unambiguously define her own identity. Atwood uses this strategy to show that the new environment has disturbed the Moodie persona so much that she can no longer think rationally and retain her thoughts within the limits of previously imposed categories. Her thoughts and thereby her sense of self, mutate and adjust to new conditions, so they can no longer fit into old "boxes", despite her unquenchable need to categorize everything around her and in that way rationally explain to herself what she currently experiences. Speaking of categorization, her obsession with binary oppositions throughout the collection (wilderness/civilization, chaos/order, madness/rationality, native/settler, etc.) points not only to her divided self, but also to the fact that she was born and bred in the colonizing world which was practically built upon such oppositions, or more precisely, which was taking full advantage of those oppositions in order to ensure its dominance over the "other". Atwood concludes in the Afterword of her collection that through the last few poems, which depict her afterlife, the Moodie persona "has become the spirit of the land she once hated" (*JSM* 64). She has managed to achieve identification with the new land after all, although in some her feelings and inclinations she remained loyal to the identity she had before the Canadian experience. Hall's statement that identities are constantly transforming and constructing at various social intersections (*Who Needs Identity* 17) resonates here – the formation of identity is never a finished process. Thus, contemporary immigrants subjected to similar psychological

ordeals as Susanna Moodie and her literary alter-ego struggle to achieve a definite sense of selves – their divided, ambiguous senses of identity more often than not prevent them from putting themselves in any clearly defined category and they always remain fragmented. As Hall claims, the fragmented form of an identity is not only a migrant experience, but a modern experience (*Minimal Selves* 44). Therefore, it can be concluded that Canada accommodates this fragmentariness by opting for multiculturalism and, consequently, by allowing identity to be questioned, as it will be seen in the analysis of the next two works.

## **4. THE SELECTION FROM *TALES FROM FIROZSHA BAAG* BY ROHINTON MISTRY**

### **4.1. The background**

The Parsis are an East Indian community who originate from the ancient Persia, the present-day Iran, and who belong to Zoroastrianism, one of the oldest monotheistic religions in the world. Approximately a thousand years ago, in order to escape religious persecution and conversion to Islam, they left Persia and eventually the majority of them settled in India, mainly in the state of Gujarat. According to Rashna Writer, Parsis were granted religious refugee status on the condition of adopting a few Indian traditions, among which was the Gujarati language, and accepting some of the common cultural practices. They did it without complaints, being grateful for the provided shelter, and therefore they are generally regarded as having “the intrinsic adaptability” which “did not dilute their intrinsic Zoroastrianess in terms of national identity” (Writer 129). Over the centuries, and especially during the period of the British Empire, they became successful business people and better educated than the majority of Indians. Still, they remained a distinctive community within Indian society, even being considered a separate caste, and they were known for being open to Western influences. Writer states that the

Parsis were on the periphery of Indian society prior to the arrival of the British, then becoming significant intermediaries between the western rulers and the Indians. The British were prepared to cultivate the Parsis so far as it served their commercial and political purposes; but the British did not see the Parsis as ‘Englishmen’. (131)

Despite designating Parsis as the ones on top of Indian society which would exercise the British authority to a point, the British retained the strict division between themselves and Parsis – the latter were always considered “other” by the former. T.M. Luhrmann adds that “they had, more or less as a community, identified themselves with the British, and adopted their own self-representation using British colonial representation as a model” (Luhrmann 21). Over time and owing to their connection with the colonizers, they established themselves as an elite society in India. They also greatly contributed to the development of Indian cities: “Parsis in general are proud and even boastful about the community’s role in modern Indian history. Bombay is full of statues of important Parsis as well as hospitals, schools, and libraries built with Parsi funds” (46). After the fall of the British Empire and India’s newly gained independence in 1947, Parsis lost their Western role models and got trapped in what some of them thought was a backward world of their less educated, less sophisticated and generally inferior compatriots: “They were not going to become European, after all. They were going to become a tiny minority in a world of the Hindu masses whom they had tried so hard to see as Other” (21). In the following decades many of them decided to migrate to Western countries and one of them is the writer of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Rohinton Mistry, who emigrated to Toronto in 1975. His collection of short stories, published in 1987, offers an interesting glimpse at the Parsi community in Bombay and at the lives and struggles of Parsi immigrants in Canada in the second half of the 20th century.

As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, Canada was undergoing major changes during the 1960s and 1970s regarding demography and policies concerning immigration. According to Sarah V. Wayland,

the racial, ethnic, and cultural composition of migrants to Canada has changed drastically since the new immigration legislation was implemented in 1968. ... Canada’s mosaic has expanded to include new races, religions, and cultures ... which has had a profound impact on policies at all levels of government. Most notably, it has been evidenced in the shift from Anglo-conformity to multiculturalism. (Wayland 45-46)

Mistry’s protagonists arrive in Canada in the midst of those changes and, being a visible minority<sup>6</sup> there, encounter problems which multiculturalism brings along, such as racial

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<sup>6</sup> *Statistics Canada* defines the term as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”.

prejudice and difficulties in adapting to the Western way of life. Margaret Atwood in her book *Survival*, in which she states that the central symbol of Canada is precisely the term from the title, observes the following:

A preoccupation with one's survival is necessarily also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival. In earlier writers these obstacles are external – the land, the climate, and so forth. In later writers the obstacles tend to become both harder to identify and more internal; they are no longer obstacles to physical survival, but obstacles to what we may call spiritual survival, to life as anything more than a minimally human being. (*Survival* 33)

Taking that into consideration, in comparison with Atwood's Moodie Mistry's protagonists face another set of difficulties and hindrances on their way to become fully Canadian, among which are the colour of their skin and their previous internal struggles with their Parsi identity as such, which additionally come to light in the new environment where they again feel alienated and different from the majority, but this time their position is significantly different than it was back in India – this time, they find themselves in the position of "other". While the Moodie persona had to overcome obstacles imposed by the relentless Canadian nature, Mistry's protagonists move to urban Canadian areas where they get office jobs. Also, in several instances in the three analysed stories it is directly or indirectly implied that they are highly educated professionals. Additionally, their Parsi background suggests that they come from upper-middle class, while the Moodie persona, being based on the real-life Moodie, belongs to middle class. While Moodie's race is her asset, Mistry's protagonists find race to be their disadvantage in Canada despite belonging to a class which is influential in India. Their prestigious Parsi social status, powerful in India, is insignificant in the new land; just as Moodie's respectable middle-class background has little influence in the country of immigration where she has to start anew in almost every aspect. In the following analysis of the three selected stories from the collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag* it will be discussed how the hardships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century South Indian immigrants to Canada transform their world views and identities.

#### **4.2. *Lend Me Your Light***

The story “Lend Me Your Light” deals with a young Parsi immigrant in Canada, Kersi, who finds himself in between two viewpoints, the representatives of which are his brother Percy and Percy’s former best friend Jamshed. Percy and Jamshed were childhood friends whose relationship faltered during college years and afterwards because of their opposing world views. Over the years, Percy has developed social awareness which prompted him to establish an organization with the goal of financially supporting the poor farmers of a small village, who were often victims of money lenders. Jamshed, on the other hand, emigrated to New York as he saw no future for himself in India. Upon emigration, he rarely missed an opportunity to condescendingly criticize the country of his birth and express disbelief at his educated peers who chose to stay there. Kersi, who emigrated the same year as Jamshed and is the narrator of the story, chronologically retells parts of his childhood and youth in order to shed light on his decision to leave India, as well as on the doubts he had during his first years of living abroad.

Kersi reminisces about his parents who fully supported his going to Canada, predicting a lot of opportunities there, which would be impossible for him to come across in India. In a conversation with Jamshed, during which they tried to prove that their son is also a worldly man, they said that they had seen

advertisements in newspaper from England, where Canadian Immigration is encouraging people to go to Canada. Of course, they won’t advertise in a country like India – who would want these bloody *ghatis* to come charging into their fine land? – but the office in New Delhi is holding interviews and selecting highly qualified applicants. (Mistry 178)

A few interesting points and information can be extracted from this single sentence. First, Kersi’s parents are obviously following foreign press, which signifies stereotypical Parsis who are interested in the Western world as much as, and if not more than, they are interested in the world they live in. The newspaper being British is also no surprise at all, since deep down they are still mourning the connection they had with Britain and the position the Empire was granting them. Second, by mentioning “highly qualified applicants” they allude to the fact that Kersi is highly educated, westernized and fluent in English language, which means they consider him an ideal candidate for immigration to Canada, a desirable immigrant. Third, the condescending attitude about India signifies their feeling of superiority over their

compatriots. Bindu Malieckal argues that despite reforms concerning immigration, a “study of racism in Canadian immigration practices from 1967 to 1973 finds systemic bigotry against non-white, non-European applicants and immigrants” (Malieckal 375). However, Parsis consider themselves different from Indians not only due to their former affiliation with the British, but also due to race – namely, they consider themselves white, or at least sharing a common heritage with the whites (374). Therefore, Kersi is, in his parents’ view, destined to immigrate to the West and successfully adjust there, although they do not seem to be aware of the complexities of Canadian culture which differs from the one they aspire to, the British one.

The feeling of superiority Kersi’s parents maintain over Indians is accentuated by the derogatory term *ghati* often used by the Parsis in the story to describe Indians. According to Malieckal, *ghati* is “a term of derision” with “numerous connotations but no one definition ... In colloquial Hindi, ‘ghati’ refers to ... people who are either regarded as ‘low class’ or who are from rural areas beyond Bombay” (362). Kersi recalls childhood conversations he listened to which often included that word: “In the particular version of reality we inherited, *ghatis* were always flooding places, they never just went there. *Ghatis* were flooding the banks, desecrating the sanctity of institutions, and taking up all the coveted jobs. ... Wherever you turned, the bloody *ghatis* were flooding the place” (Mistry 176). J. David Cisneros noticed in his 2008 article quite a few similarities in media portrayals of pollution catastrophes and immigrants, primarily when it comes to term usage: “Using similar techniques as the news media coverage of pollution, immigrants are portrayed visually in news media rhetoric as stationary pollutants contaminating communities and the environment” (Cisneros 580). The way in which Kersi’s parents imagine their supposedly inferior compatriots coming to a civilized Western country such as Canada does not differ much from Cisneros’ description. The notion of immigrants as pollutants can to a point be connected to the fear of “going native” already discussed in the analysis of Atwood’s poems. In this case Indians take over the role of the Natives, since both groups have systematically been seen as “other” by the British (and Parsis) and the colonizers, respectively. Close encounters with the “other” seem threatening to the dominant group, as any contact might “contaminate” the supposed purity of the dominant group’s way of life. Of course, as Kersi’s parents see a significant difference between themselves and other Indians, they imagine that a respectable Parsi could encounter nothing but an open-armed welcome to Canada. However, in Canada he witnesses a reversal of his until-then dominant position – as a non-Caucasian immigrant, he suddenly becomes a



potentially subjected “other” and he recognizes the ambiguity of his status as a Parsi man. Although Kersi himself was sometimes irritated by India throughout his life, he fully grasps the discriminatory cloud surrounding the derogatory term *ghati* only after settling in his new country, saying: “With much shame I remember this word *ghati*. A suppurating sore of a word, oozing the stench of bigotry” (Mistry 176). Only after he finds himself in a new, subordinate position of a non-white immigrant and a visible minority, Kersi is able to comprehend what it means to be on the other side of privilege.

The usage of a word from a foreign language such as *ghati* (and many others in Mistry’s stories) in a text written in English (or any other Western, dominant language) is called a metonymic gap, which Ashcroft et al. define as a

Cultural gap formed when appropriations of a colonial language insert un glossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references that may be unknown to the reader. ... In effect, the writer is saying ‘I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my experience. (Ashcroft et al. 122-123)

A metonymic gap serves as a statement of defiance, giving the writer an opportunity to reject submissiveness to the colonial and retain their subjectivity. That rejection Ashcroft et al. define as abrogation, or “the rejection by post-colonial writers of a normative concept of ‘correct’ or ‘standard’ English used by certain classes or groups, and of the corresponding concepts of inferior ‘dialects’” (3-4). Therefore, abrogation is the writing process which employs the literary device of metonymic gap. Closely related to abrogation is appropriation, another technique frequently used by postcolonial writers such as Mistry. Appropriation refers to the way in which postcolonial societies adopt aspects of the dominant culture (such as language) and use them to express their own ideas and identities. Ashcroft et al. see the following purpose in appropriation:

By appropriating the imperial language, its discursive forms and its modes of representation, post-colonial societies are able, as things stand, to intervene more readily in the dominant discourse, to interpolate their own cultural realities, or use that dominant language to describe those realities to a wide audience of readers or ‘marginal variants’. (16)

Mistry uses appropriation in that he writes in English, i.e. the dominant imperial language, and he uses abrogation by means of inserting Hindi words such as *ghati* into his text. Such practice could potentially have a positive impact on the (Western) readers who might be imbued with one-dimensional stereotyped notions of the “other” culture and people, reminding them to revise their beliefs and see beyond what is being served in the mainstream culture.

Kersi proceeds to remember his last day in Bombay before the departure to Toronto – he woke up with conjunctivitis and had to wear “protective dark glasses till the infection was gone” (Mistry 180). He sees symbolism in that unfortunate event: “I saw myself as someone out of a Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto” (Mistry 179-180). That “throbbing between two lives” (Mistry 180) symbolizes his utter sense of displacement or, more precisely, of double displacement. Since he has never fully belonged to India due to his Parsi heritage, he was born into the state of non-belonging, despite being a part of a privileged minority. In Canada he experiences a culture shock upon encountering a significantly different lifestyle and realizing that now he is a part of a marginalized minority. Being twice displaced additionally hinders his ability to adapt successfully.

The dark glasses might be a symbol of Kersi’s blurred vision of reality – he is unable to clearly see where he belongs to. In comparison to Kersi, his brother Percy found his truth in fighting for the better future of India, so Malieckal concludes that Percy “has clear ‘vision’: he sees problems in postcolonial India, but he visualizes and implements solutions” (Malieckal 380). Jamshed, on the other hand, is completely convinced in the rightness of his departure to the USA. After one year spent in Canada, he receives a letter from Jamshed in which he openly discards everything Indian, leaving Kersi puzzled by all that contempt. Kersi wonders whether the contempt actually stems from Jamshed’s inability to reconcile with himself (Mistry 181), with his inability to escape his own “Indianness” which is equal to “otherness” in the Western world, the world he so eagerly wants to call his own. Malieckal notices that “Indian immigrants often perpetuate racist attitudes when they return to India to visit. In *Swimming Lessons*<sup>7</sup>, professionals who form India’s so-called ‘brain drain’ are convinced that they are superior to everything left behind in India” (Malieckal 376-377).

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<sup>7</sup> Malieckal refers to the second edition of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, published under the name *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* in 1989.

Indians and, for that matter, Parsis such as Jamshed, appropriate the racist discourse of their country of immigration in order to fit in and assimilate. Although he does not feel nostalgic towards the old world at all, Kersi has the urge to defend India, so he writes back to Jamshed lying that he visits many wonderful Indian restaurants and shops in Toronto. In reality, he has become almost repulsed by those places and he consequently feels guilt for not feeling homesick, so he opts for covering it up because otherwise he would have to admit both to Jamshed and to himself that he has also to a point appropriated Western notions of India. Upon receiving his brother's letter from India in which Percy, as determined as ever to help the ones in need, describes his every day fights to improve the rotten and backward system, Kersi's guilt intensifies: "There you were, my brother, waging battles against corruption and evil, while I was watching sitcoms on my rented Granada TV" (Mistry 184). Thus he becomes aware of how the life in the new land has given him a completely different set of opportunities which he would not be able to have if he stayed in India. He also realizes how much he has changed and assimilated to the Western way of life, but he is still unsure how that experience places him within Canadian context, since the cultural gap between his background and the lifestyle in Canada remains to be an obstacle to build a new identity.

As much as Kersi disapproves of Jamshed's arrogant and superior attitude towards India, upon his first return from Canada to Bombay he cannot help but be similarly annoyed by the city and its residents. This time he sees Bombay clearly, without conjunctivitis and the dark sunglasses, and he is frustrated to see a land without much hope for improvement, just as Jamshed claimed. What effectively enrages Kersi at this point is the fact that he is more like Jamshed than he dares to acknowledge. Although he recognizes and respects the nobleness of his brother Percy's everyday sacrifices, he also wants a better future for himself in the West, and he feels guilty because of it. When he misses his bus upon the return to Bombay, Kersi instantly feels the old urge to run after it so as to catch it, but while he hesitates to do so, the bus already moves too far to be caught and he is left there "with the old and the feeble" (Mistry 187). He comments: "With the old and the feeble was my place, as long as I was a tourist here, and not committed to life in the combat zone" (Mistry 188). Kersi believes that he does not deserve more than that, since he turned his back to the country of his birth and decided to live abroad. His failure to live according to the old ways and the bus he did not manage to catch indicate his growing separation from India. During Kersi's stay in Bombay, his brother Percy unexpectedly comes to visit their family, but only to bring bad news: his business partner Navjeet, with whom he had run the organization to help the poor farmers

escape the usurers, was killed by those same corrupted money-lenders. Jamshed's visit to Bombay coincides with that unfortunate event which instantly confirms his pessimistic attitude towards India, "a country he views disdainfully as mired in dirt, poverty and corruption and, thus, a lost cause" (Morey 57). Jamshed again exhibits stereotypical prejudice that Parsis have towards the country and its inhabitants, believing, according to Malieckal, "that India's problems are caused by the immorality of India's 'low class' and 'low caste people'" (Malieckal 377). His I-told-you-so rant is the final nail in his coffin when it comes to Percy's respect for him and their friendship, for it divides them once and for all – Jamshed remains determined in his praise for the West whereas Percy decides to stay with his friends and keep fighting for what he believes is right. With the act of separating himself from Jamshed's prejudices which can be thought of as stereotypical for Parsis, Percy steps away from uncompromisingly following a tradition and opts for a tangible contribution to the community. Malieckal argues that "Percy's courage to challenge the traditions of oppression makes him a noteworthy and even heroic Parsi, perhaps more so than those who simply submit substantial charitable donations without getting their hands dirty in the grittiness of real social work" (380). Percy therefore stands out in comparison with his fellow Parsis not only as the one who rolls up his sleeves and does not run from the dirty work, but also as the one who has perhaps outgrown the need to separate people according to ethnicity or social status, and the need to align himself exclusively with his own kind. He lives according to his own moral principles, ignoring the boundaries imposed upon him by the society he grew up in.

At the end of the story Kersi returns to Canada equally puzzled as he was before leaving Toronto and during his stay in Bombay. "The epiphany" (Mistry 192) would not come, the sense of identity and belonging evades him again, and he does not see the same light of purpose as Percy does. Luhrmann notices that "The narrator sides with Percy. But he has chosen Jamshed's life" (Luhrmann 59). In the closing scene, Kersi receives another letter from Jamshed which he throws away without reading it, leaving the end of the story open to interpretation. For now he still seems to be at the eternal crossroads of his conflicting sense of identity. The act of discarding the letter might symbolise his will to try again in the new world and leave his old life behind. Also, he does step out of the frame by recognizing discriminatory patterns used by Parsis to degrade their Indian compatriots, so as by questioning the morality of his decision to emigrate. However, at the end one can still see him as a representative of an average Parsi – forever in between two contrasting poles. Such

position resonates with the one of a Canadian as well – an incorporation of doubleness which is, to evoke Hutcheon’s thought, one of the crucial characteristics of immigrants in Canada that prevents them to achieve unambiguity.

### **4.3. *Squatter***

The story “Squatter” is written in the form of a frame-story, which implies that the extradiegetic level of narration, which employs a heterodiegetic narrator, incorporates in itself a few shorter stories narrated by the character Nariman Hansotia. Nariman is a Parsi man highly influenced by the Western culture which is visible in many aspects of his personality – for example, he drives a 1932 Mercedes Benz, wears a “Clark Gable moustache” (Mistry 146) and is enthusiastic in his love of English language. He visits his favourite library daily, where he informs himself about the world and expands his knowledge about various fields, which signifies his true “Parsiness” in that he highly values education. He also has the habit of telling instructive stories, which could also be defined as parables, to the children from the Baag. Once he tells them a story about a Parsi man named Sarosh who emigrated to Canada but promised to return if he did not become “completely Canadian in exactly ten years” (155). Sarosh did not have many problems in adapting to the new country, except one major problem which caused him distress – he could not adjust to the Western toilets and therefore he saw himself as a failure: “If he could not be westernized in all respects, he was nothing but a failure in this land – a failure not just in the washrooms of the nation but everywhere” (162). Due to that obstacle he feels displaced, and the fear of rejection in the new land is so big that he tries to blend in and assimilate completely, at the price of losing his own identity which also includes a frivolous aspect of using a toilet in a different way. The way Nariman tells the story about Sarosh is certainly sprinkled with elements of humour and irony, not only because of Nariman’s charming and nonchalant storytelling style which often leaves his young audience in suspense or produces uncontrollable chuckles, but also because of the story’s theme which seems exceptionally trivial at first. However, it symbolizes a much deeper problem. Ajay Heble wonders: “What if we were to interpret the story of Sarosh not in terms of alienation, discomfort and failure, but rather in terms of a resistance to hegemonic practices?” (Heble 54). In that case, Sarosh might be a symbol of a person subconsciously determined to preserve a small part of his fragile Parsi identity and his eastern distinctiveness in the dominant Western society. However, in the world where “the presence of xenophobia and hostility” (Mistry 156) can be experienced if a person has different ways of behaving,

retaining one's subversive cultural habits is not desirable, and Sarosh is aware of the reaction he might cause if a Western person notices "a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the conventional way" (156). Here can be recalled the idea of an immigrant as a pollutant noticed in the Western rhetoric and apparently applicable to the Canadian society, still afraid that it will "go native" if it comes into any contact with the "other".

Sarosh seems to be the complete opposite of his story's narrator Nariman Hansotia. As Heble observes, Nariman "moves with a considerable ease between two cultures" (Heble 58), he is comfortable to use what he likes from both cultures, he is a "cultural hybrid" (58) just like Sarosh, and Kersi from the previous story, the only difference being their perspectives. Nariman is a man who learned to live with the ambiguity of his Parsi ancestry, taking the best out of both cultures which influenced his identity, and that "hybridity" does not diminish his "Parsiness". Sarosh, on the other hand, subconsciously rejects the Western culture and becomes a failure in his own eyes. Upon his return to India, he cannot find "the old pattern" (Mistry 167) for everything changed in the decade of his living in Canada. Gabriel notices that "that disjuncture between his memory of home as a fixed and stable space that can anchor his identity and the present reality leaves Sarosh in a state of extreme disorientation" (Gabriel 34). Sarosh once again experiences alienation and displacement, but this time in an unexpected place, the one which he previously called his home. Taking into consideration Hall's theory of ever-changing identities of both people and places due to various circumstances, it does not seem improbable that one's return to a supposedly known place might result in a discrepancy between memory and reality. To Sarosh, India is now a new place of immigration within which he has to contextualize himself.

Regarding Sarosh's inability to adjust, Luhrmann argues that a worrying trend has been noticed within Parsi community in India after the fall of the British Empire. Namely, during her research for the book on the community, she witnessed many Parsis being concerned about their young men who have reportedly gradually lost drive for contributing to the society and taking initiative in general, as if they are "impotent". Luhrmann summarizes it thus: "Again and again I heard variations on this theme: we got rich, we were for a time the richest community in India; because of our wealth the men became complacent and lazy and felt no need to adjust to changing times, and now we are burdened with our expensive lifestyle without the means to maintain it" (Luhrmann 137). The comfortable lifestyle spoiled them and therefore they lost an ability to adapt. While Kersi from the previous story manages to escape that pattern and takes initiative to change his life by trying to find his identity in the

new country, Sarosh fails at that task. Taking into consideration Luhrmann's conclusion, the privileged position has robbed Sarosh of an opportunity to be more flexible and therefore improve his life. Additionally, his inability to adapt might also symbolize Parsis' inability to let go of their British past in which they were respected and admired. Observing from another angle, Sarosh's inability to adapt might also point to a problem concerning multiculturalism. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel argues that the story "powerfully articulates the problems that arise when an assimilationist multicultural state fails to include the ethnic subject in the national imaginary" (Gabriel 33). According to Will Kymlicka, before the adoption of official multicultural policy, the idea that immigrants should completely assimilate to the new country was strongly encouraged in Canada by the government. In contrast, multicultural policy advocated a cultural mosaic in which everyone is fairly represented, so assimilationist policies have been abandoned around the middle of the century (Kymlicka 370). However, just as racial prejudice remained present well into the era of multiculturalism, so did assimilationist ideas. Sarosh's inability to assimilate completely, according to Gabriel, points to an insurmountable cultural difference which, in essence, constitutes, or should constitute, multiculturalism and the plurality of Canadian identity (Gabriel 34, 35). That difference should be accepted and integrated as another aspect of Canadian identity, just as the multicultural policy officially advocates, but does not always apply in practice. The gap which opens up between two cultures due to the aforementioned difference and which prevents complete assimilation can be connected with Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the Third Space of enunciation. According to Bhabha, the term refers to the "contradictory and ambivalent space" in which "all cultural statements and systems are constructed" (Bhabha 37). That space develops within the state of hybridity, which Ashcroft et al. define as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft et al. 108). Therefore, the Third Space of enunciation can be understood as an extremely useful occurrence in forming a multicultural identity of a country. Transferred to the context of Mistry's story, the process can be explained thus: Sarosh's contact with the new culture causes the emergence of hybridity within which, due to the difference he is unable to overcome, a gap opens up, or more specifically, the Third Space of enunciation appears. Within that space, Sarosh's new distinctive cultural identity is formed and, as such, acts as another parameter in defining Canadian multiculturalism. However, as Sarosh refuses to accept any form of being a part of the new country other than complete assimilation, he misses the opportunity to participate in the process of defining Canadian multiculturalism by contributing with his identity formed within the space of difference.

#### 4.4. *Swimming Lessons*

In the story “Swimming Lessons” the autodiegetic narrator describes his life as an immigrant in Canada. Although his name is not explicitly stated in the story, the narrator mentions that his grandfather would bring candy “for Percy and me” (Mistry 231) – Percy being his brother introduced in the story “Lend Me Your Light” – and there are also critics such as Peter Morey who confirm that the narrator of the story is Kersi (Morey 63-68), so in this analysis the narrator will be referred to by that name. This time, Kersi has troubles with swimming in Canada – as he decides to take adult swimming lessons, he discovers his newly gained fear of water. Just before the first lesson he encounters verbal discrimination by being called a derogatory term: “As I enter the showers three young boys, probably from a previous class, emerge. One of them holds his nose. The second begins to hum, under his breath: Paki Paki, smell like curry” (Mistry 238). It is hard not to remember the equally racist term *ghati* and again recognize the ambiguous position of Parsis and the reversal of their power in different circumstances. Malieckal summarized it here: “They find that the superiority, entitlement, and distinctiveness that they harbored in India are meaningless in North America, where western notions of white patriarchy determine privilege” (Malieckal 372). There is another instance of racial stereotyping in the story, this time auto-stereotyping by Kersi himself. As he fantasies about meeting an attractive woman during his lessons and imagines a whole course of their interaction, he hopes that she will “look me straight in the eye with her intentions; she will come home with me, to taste the pleasures of my delectable Asian brown body whose strangeness has intrigued her and unleashed uncontrollable surges of passion inside her” (Mistry 236). Kersi obviously deconstructs his position in the Western society by offering a classic example of orientalism where a person of non-dominant descent is reduced to their “exotic” physical traits which awaken primitive desires in otherwise civilized Westerners. By the textbook way in which he lists all his “exotic” characteristics and imagines how they will affect the hypothetical woman, it can be concluded that he is completely aware of orientalist connotations, but it seems as if he has to a point internalized those stereotypes, because he still hopes that a woman might find him attractive on that basis.

“Water imagery in my life is recurring. Chaupatty beach, now the high-school swimming pool. The universal symbol of life and regeneration did nothing but frustrate me. Perhaps the swimming pool will overturn that failure” (234) – Thus Kersi thinks before taking his first swimming class. He refers to the inability to swim in the dirty waters of the



Chaupatty back in India, which might allude to the fact that he never truly belonged there if we take into consideration the possibility of Chaupatty representing India. Therefore, if the swimming pool he enters during his lessons represents Canada, he fails again, this time at “swimming” in the new land, since his first lesson was not successful. Peter Morey argues that “Kersi’s reluctance to immerse himself in the swimming pool can be read as representative of his resistance to that cultural assimilation by Canada which, on another level, he desires” (Morey 64). Later, while he observes his old neighbour watching the snow falling and wonders if the old man is thinking of his childhood days, Kersi discloses one of the reasons why he finds it hard to adapt – his roots and memories are not in his new country, but elsewhere. He wonders: “What will I think of, old in this country, when I sit and watch the snow come down? ... My snowmen and snowball fights and Christmas trees are in the pages of Enid Blyton’s books” (Mistry 244). His memories do not align with the country’s memories; Kersi and Canada have no shared experience upon which they could connect and therefore it is hard for him to build his new identity as a Canadian citizen. However, one day he decides to take a bath instead of a shower and, while in it, he tries to plunge his head into the water several times so as to get rid of his fear. The process of immersing himself in the water is described step by step, symbolising phases he has gone through in his adaptation to the new country. There are several attempts, each more successful than the previous one – during the first one he has his eyes closed underwater and starts panicking, during the other he opens his eyes and struggles hard to keep them open. Soon he realizes that he is starting to adjust to that new vision and eventually he is able to see clearly, albeit everything is a little distorted underwater. The process of adjusting to the new vision is just as uncomfortable as the process of adjusting to the new country, and the phases of the first one reflect the phases he has gone through during the second one – panicking and then counting to thirty during first immersion symbolise his doubts described in the story “Lend Me Your Light” and the subsequent decision to be patient and keep trying. The distorted objects underwater point to the way he sees his new reality – nothing is the same as it was back in India; people, values and culture are different than the ones he is used to and the goal is to make them his “new normal”. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel states that his “ability to see ‘overwater’ and ‘underwater’ almost simultaneously (...) reflects his diasporic condition” (Gabriel 37). As Kersi himself says, “The world outside the water I have seen a lot of, it is now time to see what is inside” (Mistry 249). His resistance finally gives in and he starts to make peace with his ambivalent position. Figuratively speaking, he is born again in the new land and it is time to dive in without fear, because he has achieved reconciliation with the doubleness of his immigrant

condition. Coincidentally, at the point of Kersi's "epiphany" spring is just around the corner and he decides to buy a book about trees since so far he has only been able to recognize the maple leaf of all the plants in his new country, and he would like to learn more, to learn the "language" of his surroundings in order for the new world not to devour him. His situation can be compared to that of the Moodie persona in Atwood's poems, who did not "speak" the language of Canadian wilderness and nature either. His ability to recognize only the maple leaf, a national symbol of Canada, alludes to the superficial vision he had of Canada up until that moment, since he was afraid to completely dive into it. From now on, as he is going to learn other kinds of leaves and plants, he is also going to discover layers of Canada previously unknown to him, and in the process discover his new dual identity.

Regarding the form of the story, it is important to mention its self-reflexive metafictional aspect – the story is intersected at several points with paragraphs written in third-person in italics, depicting the characters of Mother and Father receiving letters from their son who emigrated to Canada. The omniscient narrator of those paragraphs tells about their comments on the letters and the complaints about their secretive son who does not disclose many details of his life in Canada. Once the son – who proves to be Kersi, as many of their comments point to – sends them a book of short stories he wrote and published, making them deliriously happy about his success abroad. As they take turns reading the stories, we find out that one of the stories is about a man who "perches on top of the toilet" (Mistry 245), which obviously refers to "Squatter", leading one to believe that Kersi might be, as Gabriel puts it, "the fictional equivalent of Mistry himself" (Gabriel 36). It seems that Mother and Father take up the roles of a reader and a critic, respectively. Mother approaches Kersi's stories emotionally, while Father analyses them as a critic would do, implementing in the analysis many aspects of postmodern literary theories. Father at one point mentions that his readers must be interested "in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different viewpoint; the only danger is if he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference" (Mistry 248). That "important difference" evokes Sarosh's difference, or the Third Space, within which his new identity developed. As Gabriel notices (35), Father is aware of the importance of that difference in constituting a cultural identity, and he would not like to see his son's writing assimilated completely with the new culture as he finds important that the West hears "other" perspectives and voices. Father also wishes to read more stories in order to get to know his son better, but instantly realizes that "the whole truth can never be known" (Mistry 248),

which prompts astonishment in Mother who does not understand what Father means by that and states that she is happy with anything her son writes. Mother therefore represents the reader with little or no formal literary knowledge who reads for escapist pleasure. The story closes with a paragraph in which Mother and Father argue which parts of the stories might be true and which false, once again showing different attitudes towards writing – Mother acknowledges that there are as many various realities as there are narratives, while Father stresses the importance of dividing truth and fiction. It seems that this time they incorporate roles of a postmodern critic and a traditionalist, respectively, while their comments and exchange of conflicting arguments represent discrepancies and opposing attitudes in the realms of literary and postcolonial theories.

Taking into account the three analysed characters from Mistry's stories, it can be concluded that they represent different attitudes towards immigration to a multicultural country such as Canada. Jamshed does not experience any difficulty adapting in order to be accepted in the society he deems much worthier than the one he leaves behind. However, he manages to achieve a high level of assimilation only by appropriating a Western way of life, including racist rhetoric, and discarding his background. He advocates assimilationist attitude towards immigration, which was, at least officially, abandoned in Canada after adopting multicultural policies. Sarosh, on the other hand, despite desperately trying to become Canadian in every aspect, fails to assimilate completely due to unconquerable difference his cultural heritage brings along. On his example it has been concluded not only that complete assimilation is impossible to achieve, but that it is harmful for preservation of diversity since it results in erasure of differences on which a multicultural society should be based. As for Kersi, he is the only Mistry's character in this analysis who achieves the stage of reconciliation with his state of doubleness and accepts his new identity as a hybrid construct. Gabriel states that "Mistry's text represents Kersi's identity as being in complex mediation between 'here' and 'there', 'present' and 'past'. The spatial and cultural domains of India and Canada are interconnected, existing in a dialogical relationship with each other" (Gabriel 37). Therefore, Kersi's case can be considered an example of successful immigration in which neither part of his duality was compromised in the process of integration.

## **5. WHAT WE ALL LONG FOR BY DIONNE BRAND**

### **5.1. The background**

The novel *What We All Long For* by Dionne Brand was published in 2005 and it is set in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Toronto. According to Melanie U. Pooch and the data she provides in her 2006 article, “almost 50 per cent of Toronto’s inhabitants are ... foreign-born, highlighting the city’s unique trait as a cultural hub and a so-called ‘gateway city’ for immigrants and transmigration” (Pooch 80). Consequently, the descendants of the foreign-born inhabitants as well constitute a significant part of the city. The multicultural city holds an important place in the development of the novel’s characters since it figures as the meeting point of people with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds which collide, interact and create relationships. The protagonists of the story are four young people of various races and ethnicities, all of them representatives of second-generation Canadians. Tuyen is Vietnamese, Carla is African-Italian, Oku is Caribbean and Jackie is African-Nova Scotian; which, according to Pooch, makes them representatives of three out of four largest ethnic groups in Canada – Vietnamese, Caribbean and Italian (89). Tuyen’s story revolves around her artistic aspirations and her family’s trauma from their past – her parents, Tuan and Cam, intended to leave Vietnam as refugees in 1970s with their son Quy and two daughters. However, in a crush which preceded their boarding to a boat, they lost their son Quy and were never again able to find him. They had two more children in Canada, Tuyen and Binh, but the trauma of losing a child and the subsequent guilt prevented them from ever really embracing Canada as their new homeland and enjoying their new life. Tuyen’s friend Carla, whom Tuyen is in love with, never managed to overcome her Italian mother’s suicide, and her relationship with her black father and his new wife is filled with resentment and lack of mutual feelings. Her younger brother Jamal, a delinquent teenager, is the only one of her family Carla cares about. Tuyen and Carla’s friend Oku is a sensitive aspiring black poet who quit university despite his father’s pressure to succeed academically, while Jackie runs a vintage shop, dates a German immigrant, and is portrayed as a strong-minded young woman influenced by many different cultural and sub-cultural styles. The four friends are burdened both with their parents’ stories each in their own way, and their ethnicities which make them stand out in the white majority. Simultaneously, they try to build meaningful relationships with each other and to discover who they are on their own, free of their ancestral burden.

In comparison with Atwood's and Mistry's characters who were first generation immigrants, Brand's second generation does not have to go through the painful process of transition between two countries and the sense of displacement that follows, since they consider Toronto their home. However, they struggle with contextualizing their identities within their city and with asserting themselves as members of visible minorities. The novel consists of two parallel narratives – the first one contains the central plot narrated by third-person omniscient narrator whose point of view shifts between the protagonists. The other narrative is narrated by the autodiegetic narrator Quy, Tuyen's long-lost brother who gives a straightforward and at times shocking record of his childhood in a refugee camp after separation from his family and his youth filled with misery, poverty and criminal deeds. The two narratives do not intersect up to the last few chapters in which there appears a possibility for a reunion between Quy and Tuyen's family. The aim of this analysis is to show how life in a 21<sup>st</sup> century multicultural city such as Toronto affects the first generation of immigrants in this novel, primarily on the example of Tuyen's parents. The causes of their displacement will be discussed, as well as the coping mechanisms they employ in dealing with that displacement. Furthermore, the analysis of the second generation protagonists will try to determine how their racial and cultural heritage shapes their senses of self and affects their positioning within the multicultural Canadian society.

## **5.2. First generation in between two worlds**

There are several factors which hinder Tuyen's parents, first generation immigrants, to successfully integrate into Canadian society. Emily Johansen argues that the depiction of the first generation “show[s] the multiple ways in which bureaucratic authorities and stereotypical assumptions about immigrants' skills make them invisible or reduce them to broad categories” (Johansen 52). Although Tuan was a civil engineer and Cam was a family doctor in Vietnam, their degrees and experience proved to be meaningless in Canada. Cam tried to pass medical exams in English several times, but could not reach sufficient level of language required, so she finally quit and they decided to open a Vietnamese restaurant:

They were being defined by the city. They had come thinking that they would be who they were, or at least who they had managed to remain. After the loss of Quy, it made a resigned sense to them that they would lose other parts of themselves. Once they

accepted that, it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food. (Brand 66-67)

The dominant narrative decides their path for them; they have little say in their choices. However, they accept it almost as their punishment for losing the child, on top of all other forms of punishment they already receive, whether in the form of indirectly accusing each other or of sleepless nights and life permeated with guilt. The narrator almost ironically remarks: “Neither Cam nor Tuan cooked very well, but how would their customers know? Eager Anglos ready to taste the fare of their multicultural city wouldn’t know the difference” (67). The narrator seems to imply that white customers incline to primarily be hungry for exotica they hope to find in a multicultural restaurant which Johansen characterizes as a “place defined by expectations about ethnicity” (Johansen 52). Therefore, it seems that even a society with a long tradition of immigration and the official multicultural policy is not able to overcome reducing visible minorities to their most trivial aspects of culture. Although Tuan and Cam built a financially stable, even well-off, life owing to the restaurant business, it seems that they are not so proud of the origin of their money – despite their restaurant being located downtown, they live in the wealthy suburban neighbourhood Richmond Hill. Molly Littlewood McKibbin argues that “they harbor a desire to distinguish between the achieved goal of their immigration (the house) and the site of their ‘success’ (the restaurant). This distinction between spaces suggests that the restaurant is a reminder that ‘success’ is compromised” (McKibbin 508). In other words, they were allowed to achieve success only at the price of assimilating and conforming to the West’s orientalist stereotypes about non-white “others”. Consequently, they compensate by choosing a prestigious location to live in, as if that alone would diminish the fact that they are a visible minority in a predominantly white country, and the fact that they were forced to erase a part of their identity in order for the country to accept them. Considering that language represents an important obstacle hindering integration of Tuyen’s parents in the new country, they often rely on their daughter as a translator or intermediary between them and the culture which surrounds them, which causes her to develop a feeling of superiority over them: “About her family she had taken a superior view. She considered them somewhat childlike since her power over them in the form of language had given her the privilege of viewing them in this way” (Brand 125). As shown in Atwood and Mistry, again language proves to be a power which can affect the positioning within a society, albeit in the previous two cases “language” assumed a figurative role referring to spatial and cultural codes of the new surroundings. The one who is able to dive

into and comfortably wallow in every linguistic layer and cultural code of their surroundings is the one who is more likely to excel in society. Tuan and Cam do not possess that privilege.

Another obstacle to Tuan and Cam's integration is the loss of Quy – it casts a shadow over every aspect of their lives by disabling them to function properly and adapt to the place they live in. Their personalities have been changed by the tragedy which turned them into anxious, obsessive hoarders who have an urge to control their adult children. Their house is cluttered with “generations of furniture” (62) and plastered with Quy's photos on every corner. Cam is obsessed with covering everything in plastic and duplicating personal documents because she “had a mad fear of being caught without proof, without papers of some kind attesting to identity or place” (63). The situation with Quy is an unfinished story for them and they are unable to move on until they are given a sense of closure, which seems more unlikely as each year passes. Lee Frew notices that “because their terrible loss strands them in anachronism, Tuyen's sisters and parents remain exogenous in the text, not only cut off from her, but also from any sense of national belonging” (Frew 293). Children can be regarded as physical extensions of their parents; parents are linked to their children due to inextricable genetic and emotional bonds. A reverse analogy can be drawn between the cases depicted in Brand and Atwood – whereas the Moodie persona forms a connection with the new country through the deaths of her children buried in the Canadian soil, Quy's parents are prevented from connecting to the new land due to the connection they have with their son who remains in their country of origin. Therefore, they cannot move forward, they are trapped in history and as long as there remains a connection with that history in the form of Quy, progress is impossible. Consequently, the development of national belonging is unreachable. Despite their physical presence in Canada, mentally they are still living in the old country, which is indicative of Hutcheon's state of doubleness typically ascribed to immigrants. Frew also notices that the confinement in the anachronistic space disables Tuyen's parents to accept her moving out of the family house, as well as it causes their obsessional hoarding of old items (293). The preservation of old material possessions is symptomatic of their inability to cut the cord with the world they left behind. Tuyen is also a physical extension of her parents, but as she is born and raised Canadian, she can detach from them and move on because she is not burdened with the link to the anachronistic space. Considering their differing experience, her parents cannot understand her motivation to build a life separate from her roots. The generational gap between them therefore extends to a cultural one, since both sides have been shaped by different contexts.

### 5.3. Second generation coping with hybridity

Tuyen and her friends all have a need to build their individual identities separately from their parents' and to assert themselves as visible minorities in the multicultural Toronto which is, although diverse and inclusive, still a place in which the white majority retains the position of power. Each of the characters has their own way of dealing with marginalization on the grounds of their race or ethnicity, as well as of developing individuality with regard to their heritage. Oku, for example, decides to leave university after he realizes during one of the lectures on literature that "he himself was a figure of thought in those classes – an image and not a being, not a solid presence" (Brand 168). In his view, the way in which the discourse of a Canadian university uses black people as subjects of academic dissection reduces diverse individuals to only one characteristic, their race. Oku's university is therefore a public Canadian institution which reinforces stereotypes and applies Eurocentric, orientalist optics to analyse multicultural Canadian society. That supports the premise that power in Canada still lies in the hands of the white majority. In order to prevent being stereotyped further, Oku refuses to participate in illegal activities which are considered typical for the problematic black youth. However, he is often racially profiled by the police. Johansen argues that "Oku and Jamal, as well as the other young black men in the text, can never be truly invisible to the police as they are misrecognized as always already criminal, regardless of their actions; their criminality is inscribed onto their very bodies" (Johansen 51). According to the prejudiced society they live in, their "criminality" lies in the fact that they figure as "other" – primitive and corrupt by default in the eyes of the dominant discourse. Furthermore, his subordinate status in the society prevents him to defend himself when the police confront him because he is aware of the possible consequences: "Whenever he encountered them, he simply lifted his arms in a crucifix, gave up his will and surrendered to the stigmata. Some of his friends didn't. They resisted, they talked, they asserted their rights. That only caused more trouble. They ended up in the system fighting to get out. They ended up hating everyone around them. Homicidal" (Brand 165). Again, the "other" can achieve integration only at the price of conforming and accepting their subordinate position, otherwise it is punished for trespassing. Jamal, Carla's delinquent teenage brother, is an example of the latter case. In contrast to Oku, Jamal strives to fit into African Canadian community and therefore adopts the typical traits such as a specific vernacular common among Canadian blacks. He regularly experiences similar discrimination as Oku, but he rebels against the authority and is consequently punished, which causes the rage Oku describes above. The rage results in joining a gang and



committing criminal deeds, which makes him, as Pooch states, “trapped within societal constructions of ethnic classifications and the accompanying stereotypes” (Pooch 117). Therefore, Jamal becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy – he is aware of the way the society perceives him and that he will experience discrimination either way, so he opts for assimilating with the group within which he is accepted.

As for Oku, in order to escape the narrative which marginalizes him, he decides to take on poetry and discover artistic expression of the street by visiting underground poetry clubs and conversing with an array of marginalized characters. His life choices lead to a conflict with his father Fitz, who questions his masculinity due to his choosing an artistic profession (an unconventional choice for a man, according to Fitz’s patriarchal world view), often being preoccupied with abstract notions such as happiness, and refusing to do physical work. Lydia Efthymia Roupakia states that

for Fitz ‘Black’ and ‘intellectual’ are incompatible identity categories; they simply do not signify a route that will guarantee survival. Physical survival in the ‘wilderness’ of the white capital was an earlier generation's ultimate goal. The quest for happiness, on the other hand, transforms a younger generation's understanding of self. (Roupakia 40)

Oku’s father, being a first generation black immigrant, was preoccupied with exclusively tangible aspects of survival in the new land, which manifested in finding a steady job, respecting the law, and conforming to the dominant narrative. The omniscient narrator in the novel describes immigrant neighbourhoods and their inhabitants thus: “These are people who 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” (Brand 4). The second generation, however, has different needs in terms of self-actualization – they feel secure enough in their surroundings to seek meaning beyond material success, which accounts for another manifestation of generational and cultural gap between the two generations. During the course of the novel, Oku does not seem to define himself in the multicultural context and find the place and meaning he is looking for.

Tuyen, on the other hand, manages to come one step closer to that stage. She has become exasperated by her parents who are constantly internally preoccupied with their past, not only in terms of being unable to detach physically from their old country, but also in holding the old values in the same esteem as before, whereas their children born in the new country do not understand, appreciate or need them. Therefore she decides to find an

apartment, a place free of ancestral burdens and redundant traditions, where she could contextualize herself within the multicultural society that surrounds her. McKibbin observes that “she sees the apartment as a way of defining herself and finding space for her creativity and sexuality, rather than treating space or location as an outward symbol or indication of her respectability, as it seems to be for her parents” (McKibbin 507). Tuyen disapproves of her parents’ assimilationist mindset and despises their neighbourhood, considering it “artificial”, “rootless” and “desolate” (Brand 55). At her parents’ dismay, she chooses to live downtown, in a vibrant unpretentious neighbourhood where she feels connected to the city and its diverse residents, as well as to her friends. Johansen argues that

the *real* life of the city for these characters takes place in areas that would be rejected by the white elite of the city as dirty and dangerous. In these abandoned areas of the city, these characters are able to reassemble and recombine parts of the city in ways that acknowledge their own presence and force recognition of their experience of Toronto. (Johansen 55)

Her apartment is her personal sanctuary within which she can flourish, and the company of her friends, who are more similar in their needs and viewpoints to her than her family is, contributes to the process of her defining herself within Canadian society. She has a silent agreement with her friends not to talk about their families among each other, since those ties only pull them backwards and hinder their need to grow. Tuyen’s way of dealing with her ancestral burden is art. She is a conceptual artist and currently works on an installation based on a traditional Chinese-Vietnamese art technique called *lubaio*, which would consist of a sign post plastered with various personal things collected from both her family and other people all over the city. Johansen argues that

Tuyen’s decision to make art that draws from Vietnamese tradition mirrors the dialectical and dialogical process of self-definition that all the second generation characters undertake ...While these characters must come to terms with these opposing national affiliations, they remain rooted in Toronto in a way that their parents cannot be. (55)

Using an artistic technique from her parents’ culture in her creative process, Tuyen exhibits an awareness of her doubleness due to her heritage, as well as awareness that both parts of her identity are crucial in order for her to define herself within the space of her multicultural city. With her installation she wants to represent the voices of her fellow Torontonians and include

everyone's secret longings, which the title of the novel derives from. Pooch observes that "with her creation of the *lubaio*, Tuyen functions as a translator who transforms the city's 'polyphonic murmuring' ... into a visible object of art" which "captures Toronto's new ethnic diversity and becomes a symbol of the metamorphosis of the formerly British-dominated urban space" (Pooch 93-94). Tuyen's installation therefore becomes a metonymy of Toronto's multiculturalism – an assemblage of diverse, fragmented voices which try to assert themselves as equally worthy of representation as the ones belonging to the dominant narrative. However, it proves difficult for Tuyen to reach a final idea of how her installation should look like since she keeps getting new ideas on how to mould it. Each time she adds a new piece to her artwork, the construction changes form and meaning, prompting her to try to define it anew. Therefore, the concept of *lubaio* not only symbolizes Toronto's multiculturalism, but also hybridity of both the people and the culture within the city. Points of contact each time create new meanings and identities, which in turn results in the ever-evading definition of Canadian identity.

Regarding Quy's parallel narrative, at one point it seems that his story might reach closure and give peace to Tuyen and her parents, as Quy in the meantime illegally immigrated to Canada and Tuyen's brother Binh finds him. However, just before the scheduled meeting with his long lost family, Quy gets shot in a carjacking attack executed by Jamal and his gang. Pooch finds symbolism in such course of events:

The sad ending deconstructs Toronto's myth of being the prime example of Canadian multiculturalism because Jamal, a Canadian of Caribbean Italian background who is unable to adapt to society due to his hypervisible otherness and the regularly experienced racism, kills an illegal Asian immigrant. This violent encounter of Jamal and Quy can be read as symbolizing a cultural clash on city level, since Italians, Asians, and the Caribbean constitute Toronto's three major ethnic groups. (118-119)

Although Pooch, as several other authors, claims that Quy was murdered, there is no concrete evidence in the text of his death. He remains lying on the pavement and bleeding, but the scene switches to another one so the reader does not find out if Quy dies or survives. However, the ending seems to remain open either way, since the text also does not provide the scene of the meeting. The gap which remains between the parents and their son points to the fact that reconnection of immigrants with their past is beyond reach. Also, Tuyen's *lubaio* remains unfinished during the course of the novel, which symbolizes the inability of Canadian

multicultural society to define itself unequivocally and reach the stage of harmony. The fragmentary nature of Tuyen's artwork reflects the fragmentations within Canadian society, where under the mask of official multicultural policy lie the complexities of hybrid identities and the persevering problems with racism and marginalization of the members of visible minorities. Pooch argues that the racism depicted throughout the novel indicates that "to some Torontonians, integration into Canadian society remains an urban legend" and "Canadian multiculturalism remains a myth for many minorities" (116-117). Although "the important difference" during the analysis of Mistry's work proved to be crucial for the creation of the multicultural society propagated by the official multicultural policy, the persisting discrimination on the basis of that difference hinders the development of such a society, resulting in an unambiguous definition of Canadian identity remaining unattainable.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyse immigrant experience in the Canadian context at three different points in time. For this purpose texts were selected from three authors – Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Rohinton Mistry's *Tales From Firozsha Baag*, and Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*. The analysis took into account the respective historical and cultural contexts, as well as the characters' race, ethnicity, class and social status. For the purpose of analysis, there has been developed a model of progress from the displacement to adaptation and finally adoption of the new country. There have been noticed differences in the way each character copes with the sense of displacement resulting from dislocation and the subsequent collapse of identity. The analysis focused on the process of integration and the feelings of belonging to the new land; and it consequently showed that not every character reached the stage of rebuilding an identity and reconciliation with the immigrant state of doubleness. The Moodie persona, a 19<sup>th</sup> century white British settler from Atwood's poems, experiences a strong sense of displacement in the Canadian wilderness due to harsh environment, close contact with the colonized and being unaccustomed to menial work, which results in the collapse of her identity. Over time, she relatively manages to assimilate by acquiring some of the characteristics of the nature around her, which prompts the rebuilding phase. The deaths of her children facilitate the connection with Canada since from that point on she feels physically connected to the land in which the children are buried. After years spent in Canada she achieves reconciliation with the dual nature of her identity

and therefore remains permeated with many contradictory world views, which designates her as the symbol of a Canadian immigrant. A century later, Mistry's Parsi characters face another set of difficulties as immigrants in Canada – racial discrimination, inability to assimilate due to cultural difference and the reversal of power. Their position in the new land is specific because they are twice displaced as they belonged to a minority group prior to arrival in Canada, and do not have a homeland. In India they were members of a privileged minority which cultivated racist rhetoric towards their Indian compatriots, while in Canada they become a visible, marginalized minority often discriminated against on the basis of race. On the example of the character Jamshed it has been concluded that assimilation leads to the erasure of cultural difference, while on the example of the character Sarosh, who did not manage to rebuild an identity in the new land, it has been concluded that the cultural difference opens up the Third Space of enunciation within which a new hybrid identity can form and thus contribute as yet another parameter in defining the multicultural Canadian identity. Although Sarosh, an aspiring assimilationist, refused to contribute to Canadian multiculturalism with his new hybrid identity, the Third Space of enunciation is regarded as beneficial in the process of formation of multicultural societies. The character of Kersi has been an example of successful integration during the process of which he did not have to compromise his dual identity by assimilation. The depiction of first generation immigrants in Brand's novel confirmed that children figure as extensions of their parents, linking the parents to the place of their residence. In the case of separation, as in Brand's novel, the emotional connection results in the parents' inability to claim the new place in which they reside without their children. Also, it has been concluded that racial stereotyping and reducing individuals to the most trivial aspects of their culture persists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadian society. The analysis of the second generation additionally confirmed prejudice and marginalization the characters experience on the basis of their race. Although the second generation claims Canada as their home, they experience difficulties contextualizing themselves in the Canadian society due to their being visible minorities and thus experiencing various types of marginalization. It has been concluded that the official multicultural policy in practice does not guarantee a society free of discrimination, as well as that unambiguous Canadian identity is unattainable due to the pluralities which constitute it. Comparing all three works, it can be concluded that marginalization and discrimination of visible minorities or the ones traditionally seen as "other" by colonial European discourse happens within all three time frames, albeit in different forms. Consequently, Canadian multiculturalism, as imagined by the official multicultural policy, remains only a myth. Also, since the nature of an identity

presupposes transformation whenever another parameter is added to the equation, which happens constantly in a diverse society such as Canadian one, it is impossible to develop a precise and unequivocal definition of Canadian identity. Therefore, Canadian identity can be regarded being as hybrid as individual identities of Canadian inhabitants.

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## **8. ABSTRACT**

In this thesis three works of postmodern Canadian literature have been discussed – a selection from Margaret Atwood’s collection of poems *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* published in 1970, a selection from Rohinton Mistry’s collection of short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* published in 1978, and Dionne Brand’s 2005 novel *What We All Long For*. The goal of the analysis was to present the depiction of immigrant experience at three different points in contemporary Canadian history (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, 1970s, 2000s) with regard to the historical and cultural contexts of the time of immigration; as well as to the protagonists’ race, ethnicity, class and social status. In the case of Dionne Brand’s novel, second generation immigrants have also been discussed in order to show how the immigrant experience of their parents affects them and shapes their identities. The analysis was conducted by employing postcolonial theories, considering that the theme of each work concerns the effects of colonization in a different way. The analysis has shown in which way the characters are coping with the sense of displacement and the collapse of identity due to dislocation, as well as in which way they rebuild their identities in the new land and if they are able to achieve reconciliation with their immigrant state of doubleness. In the case of Brand’s novel, it has been shown how the members of second generation contextualize themselves in the multicultural Canadian society with regard to their hybrid identities and marginalization they experience as members of visible minority groups. It has been concluded that only some of the analysed characters reach the stage of rebuilding an identity and reconciliation with doubleness, which results in a hybrid identity. Furthermore, it has been concluded that the Canadian official multicultural policy has not resulted in overcoming discrimination and marginalization of visible minority groups, as well as that an unambiguous definition of Canadian national identity remains unattainable.

## **9. KEY WORDS**

Canada, postcolonialism, immigrants, identity, multiculturalism