

*Old and New Spaces: Imagining Exclusion and Inclusion*

*in Austin Clarke's "Four Stations in His Circle" and Shani Mootoo's "Out on Main Street"*

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In his 2006 study of *The New City*, John Lorinc proclaims the political consensus on immigration policies in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to mark “the beginning of Canada’s urban century” (24). He maintains that “[i]ndeed, migrants, persecuted minorities, and misfits have long sought refuge in urban neighbourhoods, which afford anonymity but also the possibility of new forms of community” and that “[w]hen working properly, cities transform exclusion into inclusion” (13). This paper deals with the fictional creation of such geographies of exclusion and inclusion in two selected short stories by Canadian authors that were written roughly thirty years apart and focus on diasporic identities using different approaches but making similar statements: Austin Clarke’s, “Four Stations in His Circle” (1965; 1971 *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*) on the one hand, and Shani Mootoo’s, “Out on Main Street” (1993), on the other. My aim is to investigate the ways in which urban space is used in the stories as a strategy for including or excluding otherness, by paying special attention to fictional representations of space and to configurations of human relationships within space. The stories are set in a diasporic context and share an urban, Canadian and multicultural setting as well as a preoccupation with the way in which space both affects and is generated in social interaction. My focus here is especially on the production of space and identity within space, through transnational spatial interconnectedness and through internal difference in a global context.

From the point of view of their specificity as literary texts, that is of their contribution to literature as a specific medium with specific means of expression, the stories belong to the genre of urban fiction. As critics have observed, urban Canadian literature has recently

become the subject of much attention, filling a former major gap in the critical discourse of literary studies (cf. Ivison and Edwards 8; Rosenthal 5). This paper, therefore, also seeks to situate the two short stories within the discourse of urban literature which is generally dominated by the novel. However, short stories lend themselves particularly well to the rendering of several characteristics of contemporary urban life. The genre enriches the range of possibilities for its representation in fiction, for example through the strong focalization on the particular and marginal, the episodic and the specific as opposed to the mainstream and the panoramic view of city life. More specifically, the characters in the selected texts share a feeling of living on the margins, i.e., of being excluded from a mainstream to which they desire to belong. They take front stage in the short stories, thus reversing the power dynamics of identity that relegate them to marginal positions in society at large. Additionally, the short story genre fulfils a central representational function in a postcolonial context, as Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell contend when they affirm that “the restless fragmentation of the short story has a vital role to play” in “the postcolonial critique of centres and margins” (8). Being what Deleuze and Guattari have called “minor literature” (qtd. in Hunter 139; cf. also Awadalla and March-Russell 5), the short story seems to be “particularly suited to the representation of liminal and problematized identities” (Hunter 138). Yet, I share Andrew Hunter’s cautionary statement that “[i]t is extremely difficult to think what generally applicable relationship can be said to exist between the short story and the experience of (post)colonialism per se” (138), which is not to deny its overwhelming contribution to postcolonial literature and its critique of centre-margin relationships.

This paper considers space both as a geographical and social entity and as a literary artifice with a metonymic meaning. In this respect, Bart Keunen and Bart Eeckout speak of a “traditional urban fiction and traditional urban sociology” (57) and remark that several recent “social-geographic transformations of cities” (57) have effected a transformation in representation as well (60). This transformation includes the “fragmentary form” in which the

city is represented as opposed to its former depiction as a “historical totality;” also, it regards the decline of the “motif of ‘the arrival in the big city’” (62), and, finally, it implies an ideological change which intimates that the romantic scepticism towards the city has faded (64). The comparative study of the stories selected here also illustrates these changes as it rests on the assumption that Clarke’s and Mootoo’s fictional versions of urban space stem from these two different literary traditions identified by Keunen and Eeckout. Clarke’s Toronto partly leans on the modernist tradition in which the city generally looms as an oppressive threat and crushes the protagonist arriving at its gates under its opacity and indifference. Nevertheless, as I will discuss later, the agency of the city in the protagonist’s tragedy is less persuasively argued than the first sentence of the story, “[i]mmigration transformed Jefferson Theophillis Belle” (51), might suggest. There is a clear and ironic distance between the character, on the one hand, and the narrator, implied author, and reader, on the other, concerning the origin of the character’s transformation. Unlike “Four Stations,” “Out on Main Street” focuses on the episodic, anecdotic and quotidian experience of the city. Here Mootoo dismantles the panoramic, monolithic city and concentrates on a particular part of Vancouver to unearth its specific social and ethnic geography. This version of the city does not destroy the individual, but allows her to be an active participant in the construction of urban space.

Evidently, the definition of space on which I rely here is thoroughly informed by Michel de Certeau and Michel Lefebvre. De Certeau contrasts the city as a concept, planned and viewed from a panoramic perspective (157-8), to that of the city as an everyday experience and characterizes “the ordinary practitioners of the city” as “*Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write” (158). This version of urban space, which emerges from its experience, combines nicely with Lefebvre’s sociological view of urban life where he contends that space “subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative)

order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object” (73). Both of these definitions contest the idea of space as a container of human life and show that human life is “not ‘inscribed’ in a pre-existing space” (Lefebvre 78). More recent interventions in the theoretical discourse of space add new dimensions to the discussion, referring additionally to race, gender and globalization. Thus, Doreen Massey claims that “[a]mong the many other things which clearly influence that experience [of space] there are, for instance, ‘race’ and gender” (147). She suggests that in the context of contemporary “time-space compression” (147) spaces “can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (154). This is particularly relevant for the stories discussed here as they take different routes in their investigations of multiculturalism and transnational identities in a globalized world. In Mootoo’s “Main Street” the protagonist, speaking in the first person, formulates a nuanced and de-centred definition of the city as both global and local, and articulates the dynamic of social negotiations through which it is generated, in a way with which the reader can identify. In Clarke’s “Four Stations,” the main character operates with a static version of space as a container of social geographies, which is not corroborated by the narrative and is shown to be the source of his tragedy. Moreover, “Out on Main Street” en-genders modernist concepts of the urban discourse, such as Walter Benjamin’s *flâneur*, showing how two lesbians make their way through their neighbourhood in the city and tracing their “footsteps” (de Certeau 162) down Main Street where they come “out” in several senses of the word. Also, the two women are not mere observers and commentators of modern reality, like the *flâneur*, but active participants in the creation of urbanity.

In terms of their approach to identity the protagonists of the two stories differ significantly. In Clarke’s story, Jefferson Theophillis Belle, a Barbadian immigrant to

Toronto, relies on predefined notions of whiteness and Blackness<sup>1</sup> in his pursuit of a WASP Torontonion socio-economic identity. In an attempt to overcome his race and ethnicity, he rejects his Black identity and denies his links to the Toronto Caribbean diaspora as well as his family in Barbados. Jefferson's failure in the city is a comment on the fatuity of his attitude. In Mootoo's "Out on Main Street" this static, binary identity model is replaced by a network of fluid identities for the nameless female protagonist and her girlfriend, Janet, and these identities, based on ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gender, change in quick succession within the small space of a sweet shop in Vancouver's Punjabi Market.

Interestingly, both stories highlight a consumerist link between characters and space that is defining of their inclusion and exclusion in the space of the city. For the analysis of this aspect of the text this paper borrows anthropologist Daniel Miller's approach to consumption as a way of producing and conditioning identity: "consumers [...] struggle to create social and cultural identities" (Miller 156).

Furthermore, this essay relies on a concept of urban space as generated, on the one hand, in human interaction and experience, and on the other, in fictional representation. Representation, as Rob Shields claims, is key to understanding the city both within and without the text, and, most importantly, it also has to take into account place as a referent outside the text (233), which defines the city's "*trans-discursive*" nature that "crosses the line of discourse and action" (234; emphasis original). This is particularly significant for the present analysis because it counteracts purely deconstructive, text-based approaches to the city operating only "on the level of language and poetics" (Shields 233). It makes it possible to reflect upon the urban spaces of Vancouver and Toronto as demographically and socially generated multicultural, diasporic, global spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> Capitalization of "Black/Blackness" is in keeping with the spelling of the words in Stuart Hall's essay, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." There he defines "Black" as a "historical category, a political category, a cultural category" (53).

Thus, in addition to concentrating on notions of literary representation of space and identity typical of literature as a medium, the following analysis also pays attention to the generation of urban space. It is informed by a vocabulary and methodology borrowed from cultural studies, namely from Stuart Hall's work on identity as difference, and from anthropology, in particular from Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson's 1992 essay "Beyond Culture." After an individual analysis illustrating the arguments formulated in this introduction, the final part of the paper, using Hall's and Gupta and Ferguson's texts, places the stories in a theoretical and comparative perspective in order to outline the fundamental conceptual differences on which they rely.

#### **"Four Stations in His Circle": Fixing Identity in Space**

The story first appeared in 1965 and was published in Clarke's 1971 collection, *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*. In Clarke's customary style, the story is located in the Caribbean community in Toronto, although community is an irrelevant factor for the protagonist. An immigrant from Barbados, he severs his connections with his family in the Caribbean and with the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, while seeking socio-economic fulfilment through his own endeavours, in a rather naïve and misled enactment of liberal individualism.

Jefferson's strategy for going white is simple: "He didn't want to see any more black people" (54), he decides "never again to speak to black people" (56) and he "pretended he was just one of the European immigrants walking the street" (55), in an attempt to become invisible. For Jefferson, Toronto is clearly charted and divided into a white and a black space, both of which are pre-existing containers of pre-defined, homogenous white and black identities. His ambition is to save enough money to afford a luxurious house in Rosedale, a WASP area of the city, which he manages to attain at the cost of his identity, emotional integrity and mental health. His motto is that "I must own a piece o' Canada!" (51), seeing

property alone as the means to achieve integration in Canadian mainstream society. However, he does not possess the attributes of WASP Torontonian society and is constantly harassed and misidentified by it. For example, he lacks formal education and the money to furnish the thirteen rooms of his Rosedale house, and his wealthy white neighbours mistake him for the gardener. The police also mistake him for a burglar as he roams around the Rosedale property of his dreams at night. His foolish ambition misfires: it ends in self-isolation as he realises his own limitations and does not dare engage in social intercourse with his new neighbours. Finally, his past catches up with him as his mother dies when he refuses to send her money for medical treatment, and his inner voice becomes a schizophrenic remonstrance of his relinquishment of his Caribbean roots. His friend, Brewster, functions as his conscience in this respect and as a constant reminder of his origins to the extent that Jefferson starts hallucinating about him as the Voice.

Thus, his new house does not become his home because whereas the former can be purchased, the latter needs to be created and it involves the individual's subjectivity and identity, all of which Jefferson seeks to deny and replace with a different, foreign one. Neither does the acquisition of his house guarantee him a place in the urban space of Toronto because through it he merely inhabits a pre-defined space. The green colour he wants to paint it and the red roses he plants, reminiscent of Barbados, cannot help him in his project because they merely associate him with the Blackness in which he is culturally rooted. The story represents cultural stereotype as the main component of his identity which is propagated both by Jefferson and by WASP Toronto, re-enforcing his static notion of space and identity.

Jefferson's own sense of victimization by Anglo-Saxon Toronto does not fully find its echo in the narrative voice or in the reader's perception. The narrative style of the story foregrounds Jefferson as a focalizer, but the narrator's comments often seem at odds with Jefferson's own sense of victimization. The doubling of voices, that of the narrator and the protagonist being two distinct ones, indicates the existence of a critical and ironic distance

between them. Although Jefferson gets arrested by the police for skulking around his dream house in Rosedale at night, one wonders in what other ways his failure can be put down to discrimination by society at large. I would like to borrow David Chariandy's assessment of the protagonist in another of Clarke's stories, "Canadian Experience," to describe how this question might be answered. Chariandy suggests that there is "no straightforward description of either social ills or racial prejudice" and "no concrete evidence that bigotry or prejudice *directly* frustrates the ambitions of the protagonist. Indeed, one could well interpret the main character as acting rather naively" (Chariandy 146; emphasis original). Where, then, is the reader to situate Jefferson in relationship to the city, first, and multiculturalism, second? In order to answer this question it might be useful to scrutinize the character's understanding of what it means to be a Torontonionian.

The way Jefferson imagines he can conquer Toronto is by owning a "piece" of it, a house, and a suitable car, believing that property would suffice to create a link between himself and the white wealthy Canadians with whom he aspires to be on equal footing. Jefferson is obsessed with money and he promptly rejects his passing thought that "[e]ducation is a funny thing, heh-heh-heh! and I had better get a piece o' that, too" (56). His language and the off-hand manner of his speech illustrate his ignorance and mercantile view of life as he deliberates with himself whether to "get" education as if it were a good he could purchase. He instantly dismisses the thought because it appears to lead only to bankruptcy, and he simply adds absurd academic titles to his name in order to upgrade his social identity. None of his efforts to adopt a WASP Torontonionian identity bring him the recognition he desires, but Jefferson's exclusion from all forms of community seems to be of his own doing, although the narrator informs the reader in the beginning that it is "[i]mmigration [that] transformed Jefferson Theophilis Belle; and after five years, made him deceitful, selfish, and very ambitious" (51). Jefferson has a sense of accomplishment due to his accumulated material wealth and is proud that he has come from rags to riches, fulfilling the immigrant's

dream: “*Five years! five years I come to this country, with one pair o’ shoes!*” (52). He aims to acquire a piece of Canada and recognition by Canadian mainstream society but his interaction with it is only on the material level of capital and consumption. Following the Marxist critique of capital as an alienating force, this kind of criticism of Jefferson’s self-understanding comes from the narrator, stems from the (implied) author’s pen, and is shared by the reader.

Jefferson, however, embraces a different ideology, namely that of liberal individualism, completely at odds with multiculturalism, as Tariq Modood claims in his essay “Multiculturalism, Liberal Citizenship, and National Identity” (2010). According to Modood, unlike liberalism, which is mostly concerned with individual rights and anti-discrimination, multiculturalism “is clearly a collective project and concerns collectivities and not just individuals. Second, it is not colour/gender/sexual orientation ‘blind’ and so breaches the liberal public-private identity distinction” (245). In Clarke’s story, Jefferson does not adhere to collective identities connecting him either with his family in Barbados or with the Caribbean community in Toronto, but severs these links which, as he discovers, encumber his chance of equal opportunity in Canada in line with liberal ideology. He aspires to social mobility and is prevented from achieving it by his denial of his identity. Thus the story suggests that Jefferson in fact has an identity of which he retains only the colours in which he dreams of painting his house and the beautiful roses he plants in his garden. Through his total rejection of Blackness in an attempt to embrace a pre-defined white social and cultural identity to which he cannot belong, he fails to integrate into Canadian society.

Unlike other stories by Clarke, which seem to generate a sort of abstract geography that critics have called a “non-place” (Cerutti 546), this story is very particular about mapping out a recognizable Torontonion urban space, with its socially marked geography that includes and excludes people based on ethnicity and socio-economic status. Jefferson hopes to be protected from racism and gain recognition by acquiring the private space of his home, but

fails to recognize the participation of this private space in the generation of the public geography of Toronto. This public space is a complex web of social relationships from which his one-sided, materialistic understanding of immigration excludes him. In sum, the reason for his failure is an ambiguous mixture of naivety and individual shortcomings, including his rejection of his Caribbean identity, and the exclusionary regimes of the white society to which he aspires.

### **“Out on Main Street”: Negotiating Identity Within and Across Space**

Mootoo’s protagonist, unlike Jefferson, operates an internal distinction within the category of identity, putting on display the many hues of “Indian” and their subtle intricacies at work within the small space of a sweetshop in downtown Vancouver, the Kush Valley Sweets. Her version of multiculturalism goes beyond Jefferson’s simplifying and stable binary of a “self” and “other” as the characters’ identities and allegiances shift radically several times and reconfigure the spaces of inclusion and exclusion.

In Mootoo’s text, so-called mainstream white society has several short yet significant interventions which are meant to underline the fragility of identity constructions in terms of “self” and “other.” In the first, two raucous, drunk white Canadians insult the Indian shop owner by making racist jokes about his ethnicity and shamelessly display their ignorance. In the second, an Indian woman complains about the sexist behaviour of the shop owners, but adds that she refrains from such remarks in public because they would reflect negatively on the Indian community and add to the prejudices against it (55). However, the strongest claim the story makes is that inclusion and exclusion are not confined solely to the contact zone between white Canadian society and the Indo-Canadian community, but operate within that community as well: “But Indian store clerk on Main Street doh not have no patience with us, specially when we talking English to dem. [...] And den they look at yuh disdainful disdainful – like yuh disloyal, like yuh is a traitor” (47-8).

The story is “a layered piece” (Jonet 160) that makes a very clear point in this respect by displaying several consecutive realignments of solidarities among the customers at the sweetshop, according to the criteria of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In M. Catherine Jonet’s words, “Out on Main Street” reveals “the often overlapping hierarchies at work within multiple concurring diasporas and the destabilization of many of these hierarchies” (156). The story opens with the protagonist and her girlfriend being discriminated against by the shop owners for not being “good grade A Indians” but “watered-down Indians” (45) from Trinidad. Even more, Janet’s family converted to Presbyterianism, while the protagonist’s family are no longer practising Hindus. The story continues by outlining the “layers” of power and solidarity that reveal themselves in the interactions among the customers of the shop. In this way, while the entire company backs the Indian owners of the shop in the face of the racist behaviour of Anglo-Canadian customers, the ladies present also coalesce against the brothers when they display typically male behaviour towards the female sex. Finally, everyone turns against the protagonist and her girlfriend, Janet, when they are identified as lesbians. The protagonist herself bases her guess that the shop assistants are all brothers of the owner and not employees, on appearances and stereotyping (49-50). Thus, the characters move within the space of a Main Street sweetshop located in Canadian Vancouver’s Punjabi Market, and reveal not only their belonging to three different diasporas, Caribbean, Indian, and queer (Jonet 156; 160), but also to a Canadian city as a space for the negotiation of the local and the global. Whereas Jefferson’s fate in “Four Stations” is tragic and final, the protagonists of Mootoo’s story leave the sweetshop squabbling over their relationship and continuing to negotiate it in a manner which underlines the process-oriented and performative nature of identity and power relations. I suggest that this story, like Clarke’s, also embodies the “end of innocence” (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 585) in the representation of ethnically marked spaces, by indicating that it is not the white city at large that excludes the characters from integrating,

but the microcosm of Little India itself which is intolerant of ethnic, sexual and gender deviation.

The protagonist struggles both with her ethnicity and with her sexual and gender identity, and she realizes with dismay that she and Janet are “cultural bastards” (51). While the protagonist searches for an authentic identity, it becomes apparent that her views in this respect are rather conservative and normative. She is plagued by a constant and nagging feeling that she and her girlfriend fail to correspond to identity norms. Alicia Menéndez Tarrazo categorizes the two women as a “potential challenge” to Indo-Canadian identity (104), but is also right when she identifies them as gender conservative because they try to emulate heteronormative behaviour and are taken aback when their lesbian friends blow their cover (106). The story emphasizes that this attitude results from their fear of being excluded from the Indian community on account of their lesbianism.

However, other aspects of Menéndez Tarrazo’s reading of the story are less stably anchored in the text of the story. For instance there is little ground for the statement that the protagonists are “barred from full participation in the life of the city on the grounds of their ethnic origin, gender and sexuality” (95) and that the story offers a different version of Vancouver, as “an alternative urban experience defined by alienation, exclusion and marginalisation” (95). Unlike Jefferson in “Five Stations,” the protagonist of “Out on Main Street” does not predicate her identity on a fixed binary identity structure that opposes mainstream society to its ethnic communities. Moreover, the text does not flesh out the kind of panoramic view of Vancouver that would justify such a reading, but zooms in on one of its ethnic neighbourhoods only to discover that there is no such thing as a stable ethnic, gender or sexual identity. One of the main sources of exclusion and inclusion lies within the Indian community of Vancouver, and one’s status in that community can vary within a short time span and within the same space according to a shifting pattern of solidarity and opposition.

Moreover, the voice of the protagonist is incongruous and reflects her internal identity struggle. As she uses the demotic to convince her audiences of her authenticity and authority as an Indian, her slips of tongue betray that she might also speak a different language that enables her to use words such as “*par excellence*” (47), “association” (47), “italicize” (54), “redundant,” and “classify” and theoretical categories such as gender: “Walking next to Janet, who so femme dat she redundant, tend to make me look like a gender dey forget to classify” (48). Commenting on this statement, Jonet notes that “classification is the language of European imperialism, not Indian history” (159), but there is another conflict at work in this sentence beyond the one between the white colonizer and Black subject, and this conflict is fought out by and within the character herself. The quoted text is a typically dialogical sentence in which Trinidadian Indian English mixes with standard, advanced English vocabulary and reveals her pre-conceived notions of authenticity to be untenable in a globalized space. This style is also the linguistic expression of the identity crisis that the protagonist has to grapple with. Her desire to appear authentically Indian, i.e., heterosexual, speaker of Hindi, connoisseur of Indian cuisine, among other characteristics, clashes with the actual transcultural dimension of her identity, including her origins in the Caribbean, her lesbianism, and her advanced mastery of hegemonic English. On the same note, employing an authentic oral style of speech connects the protagonist with an essential Trinidadian nature that the protagonist would like to discover within herself: “I looking forward to de day I find out dat place inside me where I am nothing else but Trinidadian, whatever dat would turn out to be” (52).

Another instance of the text’s dialogic and, additionally, transnational nature is its intertextual link to the literary tradition of the Main Street and with the 18<sup>th</sup> century tradition of coffee houses as public spaces where public discourses are constructed. The spaces in the story are contemporary, ethnically marked, gendered versions of these traditional spaces. Main Street has been interpreted as the principal social coordinate of small-town North

America, its institutions and unwritten rules dictating and organizing the everyday life of the community. Furthermore, literary scholars have argued that the small town is the metonymical representation of the nation, making Main Street an iconic reflection of the nation (Poll 2-3; 6). Obviously, in a globalized, urban context, Main Street gains new, dynamic meanings while shedding the stability of its old one. Vancouver is certainly not small-town North America, but the name Main Street carries with it a plethora of already established meanings. The contemporary Main Street in the centre of Vancouver is ethnically diverse, a central shopping street and main thoroughfare along which the location of the story, Little India / Punjabi Market is set. The traditional meaning of Main Street is further deconstructed by the characters' coming "out" as lesbians in this conservative public space. The characters do not only come out for a walk, but also to claim the space of Main Street for themselves by queering it. Through its location, the story destabilizes monolithic and panoramic understandings of the nation and the city, of ethnicity and heteronormativity, and pays attention to the particular and the different. Main Street becomes a site for the negotiation of power, in which the actors in the power game participate in several, unstable alignments. Reading the story as one of exclusion of the disempowered presupposes the existence of a monolithic city that relegates the powerless to its margins, but such a binary structure is not featured clearly in the story.

Instead, Mootoo forges a link between consumption and identity when she shows the protagonists' awkward attempts at demonstrating their Indianness by ordering sweets in the right language in the sweetshop. Ironically, the protagonist declares that "we is kitchen Indians" (45) but she cannot uphold that pretension when the shop owner demonstrates her ineptness in that role. She calls the sweets by the wrong names and the vendor takes his time humiliating her in the most painful way. As a public space, the sweetshop is opposed to the kitchen and while in the kitchen deviations from the norm may pass for authenticity, the sweetshop is the place in which norms are set and implemented. It is also the space where

discipline and punishment are meted out for such deviations as those displayed by the protagonist and Janet. Consumption here becomes a means of creating identity and at the same time it is a site for power struggles. The trope of food as a major constituent of ethnicity has often taken central stage in both postcolonial and multicultural fiction and in the literary criticism based on it. Used as an identity marker, food and cooking have served as signifiers of belonging, either to construct fixed identities or to destabilize them. Similarly, the protagonist of Mootoo's story employs this signifier, hoping to confirm her Indian-ness in the public sphere, but she is not convincing. Ironically, her attempt to use food in order to ascertain who she is displays the discontinuities and heterogeneity of her identity that she would like to blot out. For that she chooses the kitchen, a homely space associated with comfort and security, also a place for acting out the communal ritual of cooking and eating together as a sign of belonging. While this works at home for the "kitchen Indians" of the protagonist's family, she realizes that their Indian-ness is a private one, not shared in a normative, public context. The sweet shop, a denominator of a common ethnicity in the public space of Punjabi Market, makes private identities seem fake and deviant from the norm when in fact they cannot be so if norms are regarded as social inventions. It is particularly interesting in this situation that the norm does not stem from the city of Vancouver or the country of Canada, but from the Indian community itself. One of the consequences of this is the deconstruction of the idea of a homogenous mainstream urban and national identity, while another is the instantiation of power relations at the level of the ethnic community, and not in the relationship between a dominant society and an ethnic minority, as one might expect. Relationships within the cultural community are also fraught with contradictions and conflict, replicating paradigms of power struggles and frictions existing at the intercultural level.

Neither the city of Vancouver nor the discrimination by a so-called mainstream society is the obstacle in the way of the protagonist's search for who she is. The story is not based on homogenous constructions of immigrant or diasporic identities, but it illustrates the

problems of such concepts. As Shyam Selvadurai notes in his introduction to *Story-Wallah!*, there are radical internal differences within the South Asian diaspora, the very “notion” of which he contests as being “very questionable” (5). One of the main internal differences that he highlights here is the “cultural difference between South Asians who migrated to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century as indentured labourers and South Asians who migrated directly from the subcontinent to the West in the latter half of the twentieth century” (6), as is the case in “Out on Main Street.” In terms strongly reminiscent of Stuart Hall’s definition of “new” identity and ethnicity explained below, Selvadurai regards identity as a “work in progress” and sees difference (as not only ethnic difference, but also that related to “sexuality and gender and class” as well) as the principal identity marker (5). In this regard, Mootoo’s story also questions the notion of being South Asian, underscoring its contradictions and showing that the myth of origin is counter-productive in the identification process because it restricts the protagonist’s possibilities of self-identification, constricting her to the parameters available in a normative description of what it means to be “Hindu *par excellence*” (47).

### **Identity and Space in the Two Stories: A Theoretical Comparison**

“Four Stations in His Circle” and “Out on Main Street” rely on different literary traditions, as explained above, but also on the protagonists’ different conceptions of space and identity. First, Clarke’s protagonist represents an essentialist and static model of identity that the story proves obsolete and flawed, while Mootoo’s instantiates a dynamic, anti-essentialist version of it; for the explanation of these models my analysis draws on Stuart Hall’s work. Second, and connected to the former point, the two protagonists imagine space along different coordinates: Clarke’s protagonist thinks of space as clearly delineated and separable from a wider context, whereas Mootoo’s text illustrates the notion of space as a global network and a system of interconnectedness.

In “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” Hall outlines the transition from a dualist, Cartesian model of identity to one in which “all of us are composed of multiple social identities, not of one” (57). His contention is that the new concept has evolved through the influence of “the great de-centerings of modern thought” (“Old and New” 43) such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralist linguistics, but also other developments such as feminism and postcolonial studies. Hall’s theory of identity, formulated in various essays and published lectures, lends itself neatly to the present analysis for several reasons. First, it represents the definition of the self as a relational and also continuous process, without, however, following the postmodernist tactics of permanent deferral and impossible identity statements. Thus, to Hall, the positioning of the self, for example as Black, is essential to effective political action: “You have to be positioned somewhere in order to speak” (Hall, “Old and New” 51). Second, it allows for the significant importance of the local in a globalized context relating strategies of self-identification to space and place, as the stories analysed here also do, though in different ways. While suggesting that “localism is very important and is indeed the only point of intervention against the hegemonic, universalizing thrust of globalization” (Hall, “A Conversation”), he is also convinced that identity lies in difference. This belief is encapsulated in Hall’s statement that “[i]nstead of asking what are people’s roots, we ought to think about what are their *routes*, the different points by which they have come to be now; they are, in a sense, the sum of those differences” (“A Conversation”). In the stories, Clarke’s protagonist, Jefferson, concentrates on discarding his old roots in order to acquire new ones, whereas Mootoo’s protagonist highlights the routes in the migration history of her own and her girlfriend’s families, which the two girls continue in Vancouver. This has consequences for the imagining of exclusion and inclusion in the two stories: for Clarke’s protagonist these are anchored in immovable positions, whereas in the second example the focus is on flexible reconfigurations of identity positions. Both stories virtually give prominence to what Hall calls “identity through difference” (“New” and “Old

and New”) and illustrate the “extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities” (Hall, “New” 585) but in different ways: Mootoo’s by featuring a protagonist whose identity is de-centred, performative, and in flux, Clarke’s by staging the failure of a character who does not recognize the complexity of identity. Essentialist and normative concepts of identity are thus called into question.

The link between identity and place is one of the essential preoccupations in both stories as they comment on the effects of globalization and migration on the individual and communal sense of the self. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, space has long been subject to theoretical reconfigurations that help us to see it as a work in progress instead of a pre-existing container of human and non-human life. In their 1992 essay, “Beyond Culture,” anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of de- and reterritorialization to formulate their idea of space as interconnected and marked by internal difference. This resonates strongly with Hall’s definition of identity as a work-in-progress and was formulated roughly at the same time as Hall’s, indicating a shift towards non-essentializing theories that pay attention to the production of space and identity, instead of merely its representation. Gupta and Ferguson challenge the traditional assumption that spaces are “discrete” (7) and “‘naturally’ discontinuous” (6) and that they harbour corresponding distinct identities and cultures which make it possible to draw a clear demarcation between “self” and “other.” They regard this distinction as obsolete “[i]n a world of diaspora, transnational culture flows, and mass movements of populations” (10) and wish to “problematize the unity of the ‘us’ and the otherness of the ‘other,’ and question the radical separation between the two” (14). Their focus lies on the reterritorialization of space and identity and on globalized connection between localities as they “are interested [...] in exploring the processes of *production* of difference in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces” (14; emphasis original).

Gupta and Ferguson maintain that the “assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture” (7) unveils its conceptual limits in several respects that are relevant for the context of the two stories analysed here, including migrant workers and nomads, “cultural differences *within* a locality,” as well as for postcolonial identities (7-8; emphasis original). Their reassessment of this assumption leads to “understanding social change and cultural transformation as situated within interconnected spaces” and to “rethinking difference *through* connection” (8; emphasis original). Their concept of internal difference in spaces relates neatly to Hall’s concept of “identity through difference” mentioned above and it serves as an explanation for the conflicts at the core of the two stories, with each representing one of the versions of space formulated by Gupta and Ferguson.

Summing up, one can conclude that Clarke focuses on the criticism of what Gupta and Ferguson call “the power of topography” while Mootoo delves into “the topography of power” (Gupta and Ferguson 8). In “Four Stations” Jefferson imagines places as distinct and separable, as he seeks to discard his affiliation with the Caribbean and re-root himself in the urban space of Toronto as if imprinting a new identity to replace his old one. However, he is part of an interconnected web of relations which catches up with him past the national borders in Toronto, through his only Barbadian friend, and through his mother’s letters. These voices remind him of his complicated ethnicity and their cacophony drives him mad in the end as he cannot accept that they all constitute who he is. The protagonist of Mootoo’s story, on the other hand, is keenly and oftentimes painfully aware of the relativity and instability of the positions she occupies in her home kitchen, in the sweetshop in Punjabi Market and in the urban environment of Vancouver, Canada. Therefore, this story is more than a critique of multiculturalism, as some critics suggest (cf. Schneider). It offers a new way of imagining urban space and identity in a global context, as a continual negotiation of several simultaneous factors.

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