

AESTHETICS, POLITICS, AND THE URBAN SPACE IN POSTCOLONIAL

BRITISH LITERATURE

BY

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Abstract

This study examines the aesthetic and narrative interventions employed by marginalized and minority communities in Postcolonial Britain in the face of political and social dispossession. It looks at Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1975), Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1989), and Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012), along with each text's discrete political moment dealing with black and minority ethnic Britons. Along with tracking a historical progression of British legislation dealing with immigrant and minority communities, these three texts offer a map of the progression of aesthetic strategies available to authors, beginning with Emecheta's narrative documentary, and then Rushdie's unsettled "chimeras of form," and finally Smith's use of gapped narrative, each of which imagine alternative forms of community and recuperative spaces for marginalized communities in 20th and 21st century Britain. While giving voice to marginalized communities, however, Emecheta, Rushdie, and Smith each account for their own places in the global literary marketplace, and acknowledge their own complicity and reliance on forms of capital. Ultimately, what this thesis offers is a study of how aesthetics and narrative sit in dynamic tension with the state, and with forms of inclusion and exclusion, constantly inquiring: who counts?

*London calling to the faraway towns
Now war is declared and battle come down
London calling to the underworld
Come outta' the cupboard, ya' boys and girls
London calling, now don't look to us
Phony Beatlemania has bitten the dust
London calling, see we ain't got no swing
'Cept for the ring of that truncheon thing*

*The ice age is coming, the sun's zoomin' in
Meltdown expected, the wheat is growin' thin
Engines stop running, but I have no fear
Cause London is drownin', I, live by the river*

- *The Clash (London Calling)*

Introduction – The question of “Who Counts?”

The epigraph to this thesis reflects the complicated, layered history and contemporary position of England’s capital city: at once “calling to” the communities and peoples on the periphery (“the faraway towns”) and at the same time to “the underworld.” While doing so, however, The Clash tap into the anxious position London exists in as it welcomes, but simultaneously brutalizes the peoples who “ain’t got no swing” by using “the ring of that truncheon thing.” They describe London as “drowning.” What is the medium, though, that London is drowning in? What can the Imperial capital find itself subsumed under? London’s drowning can be understood as a violence against the nature of “Britishness” under an Imperial legacy of conscious exclusion and exploitation, entreating individuals to “come out of the cupboard” as though they are the monsters in London’s bedroom. London’s call is not one that originates from London itself, but rather from within those peripheral communities *towards*, who are arriving to claim what can be considered a historic debt. The historical, imperial ties between London, the “faraway towns,” and London’s “underworld” decenter “London,” as a symbol of Britishness from its locality, and link it to an alternative, more expansive global history based on colonialism that necessitates resolution into an equivalency. The “war” that the band references, is therefore not one of exterior aggression, but one of interior cultural creation. It is the flux of a national and cultural identity. While not themselves tied to any form of “Postcolonialism,” the Clash, as a punk band, exist in a similar – but not equivalent – space of political and social ostracism as migrant and colonized groups who came to London. It is in the same way as those migrant communities that the Clash turn to the imperial capital to reclaim their own subjecthood.

Through an analysis of narrative form and the textual representation of London from the perspective of Black and Ethnic Minority British authors, specifically Buchi Emecheta, Salman Rushdie, and Zadie Smith, this thesis looks to examine the anxieties of inclusion and exclusion, and the contradictions of national and cultural identity that become apparent in textual renderings of London from the 1970s to the present. On one hand it intends to make visible the mechanisms of socioeconomic marginalization of disadvantaged communities in late 20th century and early 21st century. On the other, it will identify various means through which those same communities recuperate and then impose their political and cultural subjectivities against systems of exclusion. In a contemporary moment where the desire to preserve a national identity is exerting itself around the world, I look at what factors constitute the boundary between cultural inclusion and exclusion, and as well the places afforded to marginalized communities both by the state, and when those communities engage in their own forms of cultural and political self-subjectivization. The texts I look at, novels by Buchi Emecheta (b. 1944), Salman Rushdie (b. 1947), and Zadie Smith (b. 1975), constructs of their discrete social and political moments, all unfold in the urban space of London. It is therefore within the urban space, and its rendering into narrative and textual forms that I propose interrogations of outdated and racist modes of communal inclusion and exclusion occur. By performing a series of close readings of the texts and basing those readings within their socio-historic contexts, along with an examination of the authors' positions within the global literary marketplace, I explore how formal qualities of novelistic representation of marginalized and dispossessed communities are the textual means for those

communities to question, contest, enunciate, and potentially reimagine political and cultural subjectivities.

One of the areas of exploration my thesis will engage in is the very meaning of “Britishness” as a discursive—and therefore social and political—category. Who and what counts as “British”? There is an on-going conversation about British identities and questions of inclusion and exclusion revolving around how to categorize individuals and communities as either “British” or “English” and the differences each category suggests. In the introduction to his book *Postcolonial London*, John McLeod makes the distinction that: “notions of British culture have seemed more open to multicultural and transnational influences, yet in effect serve to protect the sanctity of Englishness from unwelcome influence” (17). Being “British” therefore becomes a category of citizenship open to contamination and mixture. “Englishness,” however remains beyond compromise: “unwelcoming.” McLeod further writes, “the primary location of open-ended models of Britishness has been the city: the disruptive energies of British transnational ex-centricity are deemed to be safely contained within the *cordon sanitaire* of urban limits, beyond which conventional models of Englishness remain untouched” (17). The urban space – specifically London – therefore, sits in an uneasy tension between the sites of identity between who is allowed to be “British” and who gets to remain “English.” McLeod expands on this tension when he writes:

On one hand, London is the location where the British Government and so many state agencies have their national headquarters, circumstances which assist in the city’s imaginative function as a synecdoche for the nation. On the other hand, as a specifically urban location which has welcomed for centuries peoples from

overseas, London's transcultural facticity has made possible new communities and forms of culture indebted to its history of 'peopling' which, in turn, come to pose a considerable challenge to the pastoral articulation of English national culture as representative. (18)

McLeod writes London as a space which complicates the binary of "Britishness" versus "Englishness," but he maintains a distinction – one based on space – between the two. While the urban space of London encourages cultural *mélange*, creating a definition of "Britishness" that allows for growth, McLeod characterizes "English national culture" as distinct from the city: "pastoral." He maintains a gap between the two, but links them through cartographical means.

Ian Baucom recognizes a similar distance between the identities of "Britishness" and "Englishness," but, unlike McLeod, Baucom argues that in the latter half of the 20th century, English identity was defined by historical rather than physical coordinates. As he writes in his book *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Location of Identity*, Baucom sees the relationship between the British imperial legacy and contemporary notions of Englishness as less tied to a physical location than an ethnic heritage. Baucom writes:

Englishness has been identified *with* Britishness, which in its turn has been identified as coterminous with and proceeding from the sovereign territory of the empire, and that Englishness has also defined itself *against* the British Empire, first by retaining a spatial theory of collective identity but privileging the *English* soil of the "sceptered isle" or, more regularly, certain quintessentially English locales, as its authentic identity determining locations; and then intermittently over the decades of imperial rule, but more

programmatically from the 1960s onward, by abandoning spatial and territorial ideologies for a racial ‘discourse of loyalty and coidentity’ (12)

What Baucom centers as the heart of Englishness after the 1960s is a racial discourse, which at its heart, is made up of notions of heritage: what he identifies as “a racial ‘discourse of loyalty and coidentity.’” He argues that “Englishness” exists in an imagined history and within a patriotism that, according to the ideology, could only be expressed by someone “English.” Both Baucom and McLeod make arguments for the locus of inclusion and community within the idea of “Britishness.” and therefore the idea of “Englishness,” but sit in tension according to the materiality of identity. Both suggest an openness within “Britishness” that allows for change and modification, but an exceptionality within “Englishness” that remains insulated from change. Thus migrant and marginal community members – the peoples from the periphery – can be British, but can never be English.

To explore what it means to be British, but not English, it is useful to look into a now-debunked, but still relevant myth about how the press in the UK refer to tennis player Andy Murray. An article published by the BBC states, “the myth that tennis player Any Murray is labelled British when he wins and Scottish when he loses is wrong, a linguistics study has claimed” (bbc.com). The article eliminates the possibility of Murray’s changing identity in the press, but the very presence of the myth reveals a particular awareness and the lingering possibility of with the mechanisms of nationalist exclusion. While references to Murray’s nationality were consistent regardless of match results, there is a split between how publications refer to Murray based on his nationality. As the article says, “[i]n the UK national press, broadsheets tended to refer to Murray as

Scottish, while the tabloids called him British” (bbc.com). The split between how representative institutions like nation-wide newspapers and localized tabloids refer to Murray is significant because of how “broadside press” calls attention to and dwell on Murray’s alterity, while smaller, localized publications extend the national border to include Murray. The study cited in the article makes a further observation that reveal the stakes for inclusion within the mainstream. The article notes, “broadsheets tended to give a voice to Murray only when he was successful and that tabloids tended to use more personal language like first names and nicknames” (bbc.com). The national press mediates Murray’s “voice” according to “success,” re-inscribing his alterity through how he is afforded opportunities of self-representation and silencing. As an internationally recognized athlete, Andy Murray remains on the global stage despite his “silencing.”

But what about communities and individuals that do not carry Murray’s capital who are facing forms of silencing and exclusion, not only from the media, but from the government, from police, and on the global stage in the face of injustice and oppression? The answer to these questions lie in the racist, brutal national legislation regarding minorities after the 1940s, and the lingering insulation of nationalism: the quality at the heart of “Englishness.” Theorist Simon Gikandi locates the insulating drive in England’s imperial legacy as it helps shape national and nationalist identity. Gikandi writes, “the critique of imperialism came to be driven by the need to sever the link between the imperial center and its colonies, even when it seemed condemned to reproduce the values of the culture of colonialism” (7). The severing came in the form of a fluid category of national subjecthood: Britishness. At the same time, however, Gikandi notes, “after several decades of independence in the former colonies, it has become evident that the

nationalist desire for a radical rupture from the colonial past has failed, that nationalism cannot seriously be considered to be the alternative to imperialism that it was once thought to be” (7). The failure of severing from the colonial past is revealed in the fact of a stratified nationhood: one of Britishness that compliments, but also insulates, a form of exclusivity that re-inscribes and re-exerts colonial relations: Englishness.

I suggest that a close examination of aesthetic and literary production from “British,” but perhaps not “English” authors actually complicates the notion of racial and spatial heritage. The texts I will be looking at reveal that the seemingly static association of “English” as “colonizer” and marginal communities as “colonized” is in fact constantly under attack and constantly being refigured through authors’ use of cultural and social capital available to them through the metropole. Further, I propose that aesthetic, specifically literary production from the late 20th and early 21st centuries, interrupt the dialectic of imagined and physical Britishness and provide a new way to understand the processes of communal inclusion and exclusion within greater British and English culture. The insulation of “Englishness” is, in truth an incomplete isolation. The racial and historic heritage, along with the claims to (author)ity that “Englishness” makes are actually overdetermined and necessarily heterogeneous, reflecting the “mongrel nation” Daniel Defoe referred to England as. In the 20th and 21st century, however, the mongrel quality of the English is a mosaic of alternative aesthetic and cultural modes. To fully position myself within this conversation, I will be approaching a series of texts which challenge, redraw and even exist within the limits of “Britishness” while revealing “Englishness” to be the dregs of an outdated, grasped-at Imperial heritage: a construction

of interiority that has no longer has the bearings of cultural and capital superiority that it depends on.

The conversation between “Britishness” and “Englishness”- and the quality of exclusion that conversation entails necessarily deals with limits and borders. An understanding of the borders of inclusion within ethnic and national contexts can be understood through pre-existing critical discourses surrounding national and political borders more generally. It is for this reason that my project unfolds within city limits. The city lends itself to an exploration of community, inclusion, and exclusion, because cities are sites where the uncertainty of state and institutional power manifest as unsettled. As Etienne Balibar, in his essay “World Borders, Political Borders,” writes:

The borders of new politico-economic entities, in which an attempt is being made to preserve the functions of the sovereignty of the state, are no longer at all situated at the outer limit of territories: they are dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people, and things is happening and is controlled – for example in cosmopolitan cities (71)

Balibar here describes the shift from a model of geopolitical borders, which formerly carried with them divisions in culture and ethnic histories, to one where the link between the two – geography and culture – thins. Through his use of the verb “attempts” and his description of borders as “dispersed a little everywhere,” Balibar implicitly acknowledges the growing impossibility of creating discrete, isolated cultures, and thus discrete, isolated cultural identities, particularly in an increasingly globalized context. Within what he calls “border areas” (72), physical limits are inherently porous. Balibar summarizes significance of dispersing a state’s borders within itself where he thus also relocates the

center of the state. Balibar writes, “border areas [...] are not marginal to the constitution of a public sphere but are rather at the center” (72).

The idea of “the center” then opens into two further meanings, which create an aporia of the location of state power. Balibar writes, “the notion of a center confronts us with a choice. In connection with states, it means the concentration of power, the localization of virtual or real governing authorities” (72). Later he writes, “this notion has another, more essential and more elusive meaning, which points to the sites where a people is constituted through the creation of civic consciousness and the collective resolution of the contradictions that run through it” (72). Balibar recognizes “the center” as where power resides, but then complicates the access to power by addressing the chasm that has opened up between where borders used to lie—in the geographic periphery—and where they are now: dispersed and uncontrolled within the state. In complicating the access to power, Balibar also complicates what power means, and what it looks like. He writes, “the issue of the border [...] crystallizes the stakes of politico-economic power and the symbolic stakes at work in the collective imagination: relations of force and material interest on one side, representations of identity on the other” (73).

Where Balibar sees the two forms of power as distinct, but related, Jacques Rancière, in his essay “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” understands the two powers as more closely linked. In his essay Rancière deals primarily with notions of political possession and dispossession (having rights and not having rights): political existences which Balibar reflects through his language of interiority and exteriority. However, Rancière’s exploration of interiority and exteriority is more based in “the Rights of Man:” a signifier he himself is suspicious of, writing: [t]he actual subject of

these Rights of Man become Human Rights. Is there not a bias in the statement of such rights?" (298). He continues, "another form of suspicion could be revived: the suspicion that the "man" of the Rights of Man was a mere abstraction because the only real rights were the rights of citizens, the rights attached to a national community as such" (298).

Rancière's suspicion places political possession – and the sites of power— squarely within the dynamic relationship between the political subject, or political subjective communities, and the state. It is an important distinction to make that Rancière does not say the state itself wields the power of inclusion and exclusion, but rather that power lies in the relationship between subject and state. He condenses his assertion into his famous phrase: "the Rights of Man are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not" (302). To help understand his statement, Rancière asks, "where do you draw the line separating [the political life] from [the private life]?" (303). The unsettled movement of the boundary between private and public life – of subjecthood and citizenship – is the process of democracy. Rancière further explains, "[t]he strength of those rights lies in the back-and-forth movement between the first inscription of the right and dissensual state on which it is put to test" (305). Thus "democracy" and the creation of the nation state is a process of inclusion and exclusion that shifts and settles according to an equally unsettled political terrain.

Balibar and Rancière thus engage in a dialogue of inclusion and exclusion, where Balibar overlays the loci of political and cultural power into a single space, which Rancière then makes dynamic. Within a postcolonial context whose focus is the movements of marginalized communities within the state, Homi Bhabha further refines how power at the border is distributed by compromising the solidity of the border.

Bhabha writes, “[t]he boundary [of national identity] is Janus-faced and the problem of inside/outside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation” (4). Bhabha’s description of national identity as “Janus-faced” develops Rancière’s notion of the dynamic boundary as being not only moving, but itself porous. This availability to mixture and flux, turns boundaries, as Bhabha continues, “into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated” (4). Bhabha develops the implications of the open liminality of boundaries in describing his own book, *Nation and Narration*. About the book, Bhabha writes, “the representative emblem of this book might be a chiasmic ‘figure’ of cultural difference whereby the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space becomes the crossroads to a new transnational culture” (4). The boundary is thus the very mechanism that allows for cultural mixture. From Balibar to Rancière, and then to Bhabha, therefore, the limit of cultural identity, located in power centers and border zones, shifts into cities. This limit then becomes dynamic and ultimately, itself becomes site of cross-cultural, “transnational” communication and contamination.

With this theoretical, critical framework, we can now see more clearly how the politics of community takes shape in a post-War, postcolonial British context. In *Mongrel Nation*, Ashley Dawson, explores Britain’s colonial history, and how debates over British national identity often attempt to understand and control its interior hybridity and heterogeneity. He refers to the colonial center, the primary site of power in the Empire, as “the metropolis.” About the metropolis, Dawson writes, “[t]he migration of colonial

subjects to the British metropolis forced this mongrel nation to reckon with its long history of imperialism and racism” (8). Through an account of historical migration, Dawson engages the discussion of interiority and exteriority: of the limits of cultural and national boundaries as they became an inescapable reality as the physical remains of an imperial history returned to British shores.

Dawson tracks the history of colonial subjects “returning” to England beginning with the *Empire Windrush* in 1948. He further constructs an account of the challenges these migrants faced upon their arrival in the colonial “metropolis.” Dawson writes, “Britain has a long tradition of both institutional and popular racism that legitimates harsh treatment of those who are not perceived as ‘native’” (7). Particularly, “ostracization” and “repressive policing and immigration legislation from the onset of mass migration” created the “harsh treatment” Dawson cites. These treatments reach into the 21st century through “the behaviour of new Labour after 9/11” (7). In the face of these exclusions and obstacles, however, marginalized communities used the Janus-faced metropolis to exploit the hybrid contaminational spaces Bhabha describes. Dawson writes, “antiracist struggles galvanized the cultural resources of oppressed peoples, creating dynamic new aesthetic and political constellations whose transformation thrust exceeded the struggle immediately at hand” (7).

Dawson himself begins *Mongrel Nation* with a study of two texts that he places in conversation with one another: Lord Kitchener’s song “London Is the Place for Me” and Louise Bennett’s poem “Colonization in Reverse.” The song’s third verse most succinctly captures the piece’s sincere tone and available content:

To live in London you’re really comfortable

Because the English people are very much sociable

They take you here and they take you there

And they make you feel like a millionaire

So London, that's the place for me (quoted in Dawson 1-2)

Where Kitchener's writes calypso sincerely, Bennett employs an ironized, creolized poetic voice when writing about the same historical moment. In "Colonization in Reverse," Bennett writes,

...

By de ship-load, by de plane-load

Jamaica is Englan bound.

Dem a pour out o' Jamaica,

Everybody future plan

Is fe get a big-time job

An settle in de mother lan.

Wat a islan! What a people!

Man an woman, old an young

Jusa pack dem bag an baggage

An turn history upside dung! (quoted in Dawson 3-4)

Kitchener and Bennett's works create a tense relational system for post-imperial migrants. Kitchener invests in what Dawson describes as, "the fantasy of a colonial subject whose imagines himself returning to the welcoming bosom of his mother country" (2), a perspective he later refers to as, "painfully naïve." Dawson reads

Bennett's poem differently. While admitting that Bennett's poem, "reflects a sense of excitement and ambition similar to that found in Kitchener's work," Dawson notes that "Colonization in Reverse," "is also permeated by a witheringly ironic attitude toward the imperial legacy that connects Caribbean colonial subjects to the British motherland" (3). Bennett's ability to adopt and then refract the colonial narrative that Kitchener buys into is an early example of the "aesthetic and political constellations" Dawson mentions, which reveal the instability of the uniform state and imperial hegemony.

This discourse of aesthetic and political tension within politically marginalized communities extends throughout the 20th century, and even into the contemporary literary landscape. The three authors I examine in this project – Buchi Emecheta, Salman Rushdie, and Zadie Smith – each prolong the dialogue through their own literary and aesthetic strategies, which respond to, and complicate, notions of belonging and exclusion within the postcolonial British state. The aesthetic and literary intervention each author makes in their socio-political contexts recognizes the insufficiencies of forms of community they engage within their own writing, and at the same time, that their own writing depends on. Ultimately, what these authors afford contemporary readers are: 1) ways to recognize and critique the forms and results of communal exclusion and dispossession; and 2) opportunities to develop and foster new forms of community that break free from, and possibly already exist beyond, the categories of communal hierarchy stemming from Empire.

To make these arguments I track parallel developments in the historical, material reality of Britain, and at the same time, the aesthetic and formal strategies authors within those contexts employ. In my first chapter, a reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class*

Citizen (1975), I look at the real and imaginary forms of community available to “black” immigrants in post-war Britain, and the opportunity for recreating notions of community available to, particularly, African women that Emecheta imagines. Emecheta’s writing unfolds in the Powell era of British politics: a time where the British identity was framed as being “under attack” as a result of post-imperial migration to Britain by formerly colonized populations. As professed in his “Rivers of Blood” speech, Enoch Powell outlined an assault on the notion of “Britishness” that results from an influx of non-English speakers from the former colonies. He taps into a form of nationalist tribalism that creates a clear interior/exterior binary based on race. Within this context, Emecheta uses her semi-autobiographical novel to recalibrate notions of interiority and exteriority along literary lines rather than racial or ethnic ones.

Formally, Emecheta uses a narrative documentary style to track her character, Adah’s move from Lagos to London, and the challenges she faces finding housing, as a mother, and ultimately in her own writing project. Emecheta uses Adah’s movement within different spaces to explore different versions of community, starting first with state enforced housing and ghettos that “black” communities were legislated to inhabit. Emecheta then imagines alternative communities based on experience rather than race. The primary form of belonging Emecheta scrutinizes is motherhood, which offers Adah a viable option in her present circumstances, but fails to tap into the legacy and historicity inherent and necessary to a community, falling prey to the same limits of race and an imperial history.

Using the generative, preserving conditions of motherhood, along with a cultural literacy communicated through intertext and allusion, Emecheta finally imagines a

literary community that responds to the concerns and rhetorical maneuvers Powell employs in his speech. In using her writing, Emecheta positioned herself within a literary marketplace eager to hear voices from the periphery, and used that moment in publishing history to redefine the limit of “English Literature” as porous and accretive rather than exclusionary. Emecheta reaches back, particularly to Wordsworth and Bunyan, and relates a narrative that plainly recounts the challenges her character faces, but does so in a narrative and cultural language that dissolves the categories of “native” and “invader” that Powellism depended on. By doing so, Emecheta restructures forms of community within London free from qualifiers of political or cultural identities, and instead celebrates a more open, accessible literary community.

A little over a decade after *Second-Class Citizen* was published, Salman Rushdie, an author who had already gained celebrity status and wide literary recognition, published *The Satanic Verses* (1988). In *The Verses*, Rushdie creates a text that is inverse to *Second-Class Citizen* in almost every respect. Where Emecheta’s text is one of singularity with a fixed, narrative documentary style that follows a single protagonist, Rushdie adopts a more unsettled, postmodern narrative mode that follows multiple timelines, tracks multiple interrelated and often doubled protagonists, and suggests, if not outwardly endorses multiple realities within and without the text.

Rushdie builds his text around notions of cultural and literary hybridity, reflecting his form in the actual text by switching focalization, forms of narration, and even dropping across translated and transliterated languages. By modelling his own text as a “chimera of form,” to further position himself as the text’s authority and thus able to create a parataxis of reference and literary modes, Rushdie opens up the notion of

“canonical” literature as equivalent to foreign, coded “lower,” forms of literature. Rushdie uses music to reveal the artificiality of hierarchized culture, while simultaneously preserving the equality of cultural forms. He does so by making music a mechanism of violence and violation against the state and its institutions. Beginning with the title, itself valenced musically as well as literarily, music recurs throughout the novel in moments of violence, specifically against organized, institutional and orthodox powers, and is a sign of the presence and uncontrollability of marginalized groups. Rushdie explores the socio-political landscape of 1980s Britain, tapping into the abject nature of music and the communities that create it as a reminder to the state of the fact of its reliance and exploitation of those communities and cultures. He opens up the ambivalence of music as a commodified product, but rearranges the transactional order between the colonizer and colonized, making the consumption of music occur on the colonized’s terms.

Rushdie exploits his own cultural capital to counter notions of literary hierarchy. Despite his inverted approach, Rushdie makes a parallel argument about the limits of “literature” as Emecheta does. Rushdie turns his attention to the literary marketplace and the idea of a canon of English Literature through his use of the “chimeric form.” Through association, Rushdie challenges the idea of cultural superiority, not only inverting, but dissolving the hierarchy between, not only high and low culture, but East and West, Orient and Occident, and British and World Literature. Rushdie uses Thatcher’s Britain – one that legislated the sentiments of social and political stratification popularized by Powell – as a metaphor for the inconsistencies and fallacy of a homogenous English literature and culture. What the state, or canon, presents as a

uniform mass, Rushdie shows to be multiple and in truth reliant on the consumption of other cultures and therefore multifarious. Through turning his novel into a sign of music, an expression of the marginalized communities that use music as a form of recuperation, Rushdie exposes his own place in the global literary marketplace as a fact of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of what counts as accepted, native “Eng. Lit” (Rushdie 70) and therefore notions of Britishness and Englishness.

In my final chapter, I look at how Zadie Smith’s novel, *NW*, in a neoliberal socio-political moment, extends my exploration of the politics of community up to the present-day. Smith’s context differs in how the state approaches minority and historically dispossessed communities. The New Labour, Blair-led Britain, made inclusion and heterogeneous representation central foci of its political landscape. At the same however, New Labour embraced policies of restrained fiscal spending, electing instead to shift the burden of development onto individual communities themselves. New Labour’s neoliberal ideology thus increased the burdens already present in migrant and immigrant communities by expecting progress without providing any form of substantial support.

Smith’s *NW* takes place in a 21st century where the label “multiculturalism” is desired because of its progressive face, and at the same time, its value in a friendly marketplace. Smith’s novel approaches the notion of neoliberal multiculturalism, and critiques its recreation of forms of exploitation and oppression through the commodification of difference. To do so, Smith further fractures narrative form. Rather than employing Rushdie’s chimeras of form, or Emecheta’s narrative documentary style, Smith uses gapped narration, where she divides her novel into sections – each of which are broken into further sections and adhere to a discrete set of formal and narrative rules.

Her formal use of gaps entreat the reader to pay close attention to, and consider deeply the gaps within the text. While challenging readers to fill in textual gaps, she also encourages them to cross and mediate those gaps by creating meaning in between narrative fragments. It is in these gaps that Smith locates the possibility, and more importantly, the failings, of literary representations, and contemporary constructions, of social and political communities.

The gaps and spaces that make up Smith's form recur throughout the novel's content. Smith locates and names the failings of neoliberalism's superficial commitment to marginal communities. She reveals a social semiotic function that marginal communities in post-New Labour Britain live in: individual representatives from the margin experiencing upward mobility become signs that the entire community is experiencing the same mobility. After showing the neoliberal project to be unsubstantial, Smith opens up alternative forms of community, each of which fail in their own ways, leading ultimately to the novel showing how the idea of community itself is flawed. The failure of "community" in the early 21st century does not deaden the pursuit to create systems of belonging, but rather encourages a pursuit of alternative models based in human experience that reach beyond constructions of class, race, or material history. To do so, Smith uses the gaps in her form and her content to turn to investigate the internal divisions within discrete individuals, drawing on Heideggerian models of being. Smith ultimately investigates the place of being within belonging: both for communities and for individuals.

It is within the interstices of physical and imagined identities of Britishness and Englishness – the borderland of the city – where racial, historical, and aesthetic traditions

become entangled with one another. In looking at cultural identity and its reliance on myths of community, I want to straddle some of the currently competing dialectics in the field: idealism vs. materialism; epistemology vs. Marxian thought; ahistoricity vs. contemporary culture. I want to position myself within these dialogues as a voice to preserve the communities currently experiencing dispossession, and the displacement of their identities as a series of discrete individuals, rather than political, cultural, or aesthetic functions. This position of awareness and ambivalence – at once attuned to community and individual needs – is founded in a meaningful reading of texts dependent on their own forms of ambivalence: simultaneously vigilant of social and political exclusion, and at the same time, reflexively aware of the need for greater inclusion and availability within literary communities. These texts constantly ask themselves and their readers, “who counts?” always anticipating a new answer.

“She was beginning to feel like Dick Whittington:” London and the Literary Community
in Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*

At the beginning of the fifth chapter of Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* (1975), the protagonist, Adah Obi, reflects on her time in England after having recently emigrated to London from Lagos. She questions her decision – the uncertainty of whether her choice was correct weighing her down. In describing this uncertainty, Emecheta writes, “[w]ith this heaviness which was like the heavy load of Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, she reluctantly got up” (55). Emecheta’s use of John Bunyan’s poem encapsulates the novel’s project of creating a community, perhaps even a heritage, not constituted on gender, sexuality, or class, but rather depends on a shared literature. To readers at the time, Emecheta’s overlay of a female African immigrant with a canonical poetic figure performs a secondary function besides orienting the reader within the text: it positions Adah in a direct conversation with figures that construct “Englishness.” Using Bunyan, Emecheta exploits the literary canon to fashion a place for herself within English literature that falls beyond what is expected of her. She, as a “second-class citizen,” activates a mode of speaking directly to the “first-class” that reveals an over-determined, individual identity extant in spite of its adversarial social conditions.

The novel navigates the myriad tensions that come from self-determination while simultaneously trying to exist within a community. Adah’s quest for an individual, self-actualized identity sits at the novel’s heart. Emecheta’s work is significant, not only as a discrete literary creation, but also because her work reveals and responds to various social, hierarchical systems that withhold the opportunity for self-definition among marginalized social subjects. Emecheta does so by exploring the various failings in the

communities that her characters exist in, as determined by their race and gender. As a result of those insufficiencies, Emecheta turns to an alternative model of community, a literary community, which has a more permeable boundary between those included and those excluded. While better, even this new, literary community that Emecheta imagines has its own limitations. This literary community relies on the exploitation of systems of symbolic capital, through inter- and intratextual reference, and even simply through being written in English. Emecheta relies on these forms of capital, however, to situate her writing within an immigrant-unfriendly sociopolitical moment, but a time in the literary marketplace that was open to marginalized voices. Ultimately, Emecheta recreates some of the lived conditions for immigrants in England in a language that speaks to the “first-class” that the novel’s title necessitates. This direct address to the “first-class” seeks to split open the Briton/Immigrant binary, and redraw communal lines as accumulative rather than exclusionary.

A key element I look at is the role London plays in opening up the possibility to move beyond communities of race and gender. Susan Alice Fischer writes about Emecheta’s use of London in her essay “A Sense of Place: London in contemporary women’s writing.” Fischer makes mention of the city as a place available for, “writers who explore the postcolonial experience” (61). Fischer returns to this point when she writes, “[t]he city allows the individual belonging to two cultures to create identity at the interstices of time and place, between cultures” (62). This interstitial identity is the means through which Emecheta constructs her narrative, and the claim she eventually makes against hierarchized social class. Fischer’s argument regarding Emecheta anticipates my own, but offers a more general reading of the novel. She writes, “[i]n London, Emecheta

is able to imagine a sense of community which goes beyond the boundaries of national culture because she writes not only as a Nigerian in Britain, but as a woman in the world” (63). Fischer emphasizes Emecheta’s writing as a female author, which is a useful point from which to begin, and I aim to contribute to the discussion by incorporating aspects of the inescapable political context out of which Emecheta writes. A look at London as a space of hybridity requires acknowledging the failure of singular communities.

The most basic form of these failed communities is the state. Khalid Husain offers a useful argument in his article “Towards Socialism with a small ‘s’: Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* and the reconsideration of Welfare State Nostalgia” that the failure of the welfare state to improve the lived conditions of marginalized peoples in mid-century Britain. Husain outlines a number of effects that stem from the state’s involvement with minority communities, one of which is of particular interest to me: the homogenization of minority communities. He writes, “[t]he broader social implication of Emecheta’s photo [of her writing space], and her novel itself, is that state imperatives can homogenize subjects in tandem with gender and racial norms (7). One of the sites of the homogenization that Husain refers to appears in council housing the state provides to immigrants, which constitute one of the central images I will be exploring.

The narrative itself begins in Africa and immediately opens up a conversation with state-sanctioned oppression, appearing at the beginning with her native community’s disregard for her birth, revealing state failures to stretch across borders. Emecheta lays out the subordination of the female subject on a state and social level when she writes, “[s]ince she was such a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth. She was so insignificant” (7). The narrative

continues by tracking Adah as she educates herself, and follows her into her early adulthood as she brings her family to London to search for a home. As she moves from Lagos to London, Adah is unable to create an identity for herself because of the challenges she faces within, and at the same time because of, the communities she enters based on her gender and her race: realities that necessarily failed to live up to the myth of the United Kingdom cultivated in Lagos.

The reality of the United Kingdom begins to unravel the ideal, imaginary Kingdom of Heaven Adah expects. Growing up, Adah hears her father speak the name of the United Kingdom, “in hushed tones, wearing such a respectful expression as if he were speaking of God’s Holiest of Holies” (8). Hearing this, Adah concludes, “Going to the United Kingdom must surely be like paying God a visit. The United Kingdom, then, must be like heaven” (8). Adah, with two young children, eventually travels to England by boat, and upon first arriving at Liverpool. The boat arrives at the port on a winter day, where “England gave Adah a cold welcome. [...] if Adah had been Jesus, she would have passed England by” (36). Emecheta reactivates the sacred diction that Adah grows up hearing about the UK, but now turns England into an unsalvageable place, where even Jesus would not stop – the voluntary “would” clearly indicating the will to skip Liverpool.

With cracks in the myth of what “the United Kingdom” is, London specifically begins to surface the means through which the state forces minorities into sequestered communities, which force homogeneity. This homogeneity performs a dual function: first, it sets the boundary between the classes, where the “first-class” are individuals and the “second-class” are an indistinguishable mass. Secondly, it creates an expectation for

living within marginal communities that limits the scope of experience available to the individuals in those communities seeking acceptance. The building that constitutes a “house” is an important image in the novel, which reflects – and reflects on – Adah’s position within the greater British social structures.

The first house in London Adah comes across is the council housing where Francis lives. The housing provided by the government shocks Adah because she “could not tell where the house began and where it ended, because it was joined to other houses in the street” (37). For comparison, Emecheta writes, “[i]n Lagos houses were usually completely detached with the yards on both sides, the compound at the back, and verandas in front” (37). The inhabitants of these uniform, attached houses mirror the uncompromising uniformity of the buildings themselves. When Adah asks Francis if she is really meant to live there, Francis replies, ““this is the best I can do. You see, accommodation is very short in London especially for black people with children”” (38). Francis then catalogues the different nationalities of immigrants coming to England from the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia, explaining, ““[w]e are all blacks, all coloureds, and the only houses we can get are horrors like these”” (38). Francis internalize the state’s policy, which erases divisions amongst immigrants.

The housing conditions reflect the essentialist model of immigrant community into which Adah arrives. In the same way that housing for “coloureds” looks identical and is attached to every other designated house for immigrants, so to do the experiences and identities of those immigrants and migrants become uniform. Emecheta’s description of the homes in Lagos as free standing, independent structures suggests a more complete identity for immigrants in their native lands. However, through her diction, particularly

through the word “detached,” Emecheta resists privileging the homeland by reminding the reader that the community Adah had in Nigeria disregarded her – the same detached one that ignored her birth.

The pressure marginalized communities face to inhabit and then recreate a narrative of their identity creates a series of expectations for what an individual is “meant to be like.” Failing to adhere to the expectations internalized by a community creates a dissonance in the community, which ultimately threatens its own existence by revealing that the internalized identity does not present any true social bindings. Adah represents this threat to the Nigerian community by refusing to give up her children, or give up her work; she lives a version of a “first-class” and survives. Her survival challenges the core of what constitutes the immigrant identity: that it can never be “first-class.” When her landlord, on behalf of the Nigerian community in the building, serves Adah, her children, and Francis an eviction notice. The landlord does so because of Adah’s refusal to conform to the model of immigrant femininity the community constructs for her. The Nigerians in the building feel that, “[Adah] was having her cake and eating it. She was in a white man’s job, despite the fact that everyone had warned her against it, and it looked as though she meant to keep it” (69). Adah, as a black woman working at a local library – having her cake, which would allow her to keep her children at home – eating it, resists the sanctioned role of the female immigrant that the Nigerian community constructs. In her quest to self-actualize, the community’s resistance to her desires and ambition reduce Adah to her most basic components – her race and her gender – alienates Adah from the Nigerian community even in London.

Those same identity signifiers that ostracize Adah from the Nigerian community create almost insurmountable obstacles for her in her search for housing in London in general. After their eviction Adah, now pregnant with her third child, and Francis struggle to find alternative housing in the city, where, “[n]early all the notices had ‘sorry no coloureds’ on them. Her house hunting was made more difficult because she was black; black, with two very young children and pregnant with another one” (70). This new, inescapable exclusion begins to have a psychological effect on Adah: “[s]he was beginning to learn that her colour was something she was supposed to be ashamed of” (70). Shame about her skin color is new to Adah: it fundamentally alters how she interacts with the world around her and forces her to adopt passing techniques to hide her ethnicity while she continues to search for a place to live. Adah practices disguising her voice by pinching her nose close, “as if to keep out a nasty smell” (73). That “nasty smell” doubles as her own pervasive, reduced blackness that Adah learns to be ashamed of. Needless to say, once Adah and Francis appear in person, they learn that the rooms to let are unavailable (74).

In the aftermath of their eviction, and during their fruitless search for a home outside of their community, Emecheta lays bare the failures of race and national-based communities. Adah’s identity lies on the class border and reveals the insufficiencies of hierarchized community based on race. To resolve the tension of which class Adah “belongs” in, she situates the family in a physical space of racial and class liminality: Adah and Francis eventually find a place to live in a house owned by an old Nigerian man, Mr. Noble. Emecheta describes his house as, “a mighty building curving right into the middle of the street [...] as if it were determined to divide the poor from the rich; the

houses from the ghetto, the whites from the blacks” (87). Emecheta drives her point further home when she describes the house as, “just like a social divide; solid, visible and unmovable” (87). Once again, the building itself becomes a reflection of Adah’s position in her communities: this time, the building, as the boundary itself between classes and races, places Adah in the liminal spaces of the various binaries that construct the London she inhabits. Adah’s place is peripheral to both blacks and whites, to the second- and first-classes, but is also within the site of uncertainty where the social binaries reliant on hierarchy begin to lose their integrity.

Emecheta’s challenge of hierarchized binaries stretches into the Noble family structure, and in doing so, attempts to implode those same binaries. Emecheta creates a model of social class and racial hybridity that is not reliant on mobility upwards for immigrants or downward mobility for white Britons, but it instead undoes the notion of “first” and “second.” Mr. Noble himself is married to, “a large-boned Birmingham woman, [...] with masses of auburn hair hanging loose about her shoulders” (90). Mrs. Noble’s hair is further described as, “hanging long and thick, and curly in parts [making] her look like a wild gipsy beauty” (90). Emecheta describes Mrs. Noble as being a kind of ethnic other by comparing her to a “wild gipsy beauty,” modifying her character into a mediation between the local and the foreign. Mrs. Noble, however, is still a white Briton. Therefore, Mrs. Noble, just like Mr. Noble, the house, and now Adah, falls in between the divided social classes, not cleanly adhering to any set of social expectations, thereby challenging notions of social superiority. By moving into Mr. Noble’s house, Adah at once belongs to neither community, but also, through exclusion, becomes a member of both communities. Because of this displacement from any single community, Adah is

forced to look elsewhere for where she might be able to find alternative models of groups that can accept and respect her individual identity.

One of the alternative communities Adah finds is in the maternity ward she is admitted to while carrying her third child, Bubu. Bubu's birth is difficult and leaves Adah close to death. The other women in the ward work to lift Adah's spirits, telling her, "there were still several joys to be experienced, that she was still young, that her whole life was still ahead of her" (111). The effect that the other women's words have on Adah, though, is mitigated by a deep-rooted disbelief of femininity. Earlier in the novel, Emecheta writes, "[w]omen had a way of sapping [Adah's] self-confidence [...] when in real trouble, she would rather look for a man. Men were so solid, so safe" (12). Adah's recovery mimics her relationships between genders: it is only when she hears the doctor's confidence in his own ability that, "Adah started to believe with him that she was made for this world and not the next. Not yet anyway. The dark, handsome surgeon won. Adah lived and became a living specimen in the ward" (113). The forms of encouragement Adah receives from the surgeon mirrors that given to her by the ward women, but Adah internalizes the surgeon's confidence. In doing so, Adah's survival becomes the surgeon's triumph, which re-inscribes the forms of erasure and disregard that Adah faces from birth.

Where the women in the ward appear ineffective, the nurses become almost antagonistic to Adah by tapping into racial, and classist anxieties. Emecheta lists the names, which she describes as being "like titles" (113) by which different groups in the hospital refer to Adah. The other mother's call Adah "Caesar," playing into Emecheta's comparison of Adah's given names as being "like titles." The doctors call Adah by a

technical term Adah does not understand: “Cord presentation’, whatever that meant.” The nurses, meanwhile, call Adah, “the mother of Mohammad Ali, because her baby was loud-mouthed, troublesome and refused to be tamed” (113). The nurses define Adah by her child. Their choice to refer to Bubu as “Mohammad Ali” carries a specific valence of resistance and vocal bottom-to-top opposition to oppressive systems. Further, the choice of “Mohammad Ali” carries a separate threat – one of communicative power. Known at the time for his bombastic rhymes and spoken word during press conference and in public forms, the title “mother of Mohammad Ali” fashions Adah to be the generator of a voice of resistance. Because the physical reality of motherhood for Adah in England still entail the barriers of race and class, Adah creates an imaginary community – a literary one, which allows her to maintain her position as the generator of resistance, but breaks her free from the ties of identifying traits imposed upon her.

In light of the insufficiencies of the community within the maternity ward, Emecheta shifts to a different, imagined community model: a literary community. As winter melts away and Adah ventures out to a public bath in the early morning, she has an experience, which predicates her articulation of this alternative, literary community. Adah hears birdsong from a small, gray bird, which, Emecheta writes, is “contended in its solitude” (140). As she continues to listen, the narration slips into free indirect discourse, blurring the line between Adah and Emecheta herself on a formal level. Emecheta writes/Adah thinks, “[f]ancy being moved this early in the morning by such a small thing as this grey bird, when less than a year before she had seen wilder birds, all gaudy in their colours, all wild in their songs. She never took notice of birds then, in the back yards of Lagos houses” (140). A close reading of these lines reflects the subtle shift in the

communal model that makes up the literary community Adah eventually turns to. Adah sees a kinship between herself and the bird. While it is tempting read the bird as symbolic of Adah herself, both being isolated, even “lonely” beings (140), I argue instead that Adah begins to fashion a community with the bird based on the bird’s singing: she becomes an audience to its song rather than it singing for her.

Emecheta draws a sharp contrast between the places Adah hears birdsong in Africa and in England, which articulate how the experiences are fundamentally different to Adah. The birdsongs also reflect Adah’s singular identity as it develops beyond her being told how to feel about her race and her gender. Emecheta situates the African birds, marked by their “gaudy colours,” in Lagos’s backyards – the same space of disregard for girls into which Adah was born. Emecheta further aligns the birds with the totalizing patriarchy in Nigeria by marking the birds with the word “colour”- itself a tied to forms of oppression. The placement “in the backyards of Lagos houses” also reflects a landlord’s proprietorship of the birdsong, as though experience belongs to those who own afford it. By contrast, the little grey bird sings, “in a dark street” on the way to “the public baths” (140). The grey bird is at once in a shared, public space, but at the same time, “contented in its solitude.”

Adah’s self-awareness for how she responds to the birdsong empowers her to differentiate herself from other Nigerians, but now on her own terms allowing her body, as a black female, to be a space of subjective recuperation. As she continues to consider the bird, she thinks, “[s]he was different. Her children were going to be different. They were all going to be black, they were going to enjoy being black, be proud of being black, a black of a different breed” (141). The birdsong creates a counter-narrative to Adah’s

internalized shame about her color – a counter-narrative that empowers her for her skin color and uses that same skin color as a means of forging and actualizing her, and significantly, her children’s identity.

The text itself, in its attempt to create a literary community through multiple literary references, relies on a series of inter- and intra-textual references, which simultaneously undermines and reinforces divisions of capital that prop up exclusionary societies, like the one in which Adah and Emecheta would both have been writing in. Emecheta makes reference to a number of established, canonical authors: Daniel Defoe, John Bunyan, James Baldwin, and William Shakespeare, which performs a dual function of: reinscribing systems of power that rely on cultural exclusion, while at the same time exerting her own understanding of those signifiers of capital, revealing that the tools of cultural production as available beyond the “first-class.” One of the key figures Emecheta activates to begin substantially building the literary community is by exploring and refining a model of self-definition outlined by William Wordsworth.

The effect of the little grey bird’s song opens Adah up to create and link with Wordsworth, a pillar of canonical British literature that reaches into the language Wordsworth depends on. In doing so, it is important to note, Emecheta exerts a command of British culture that challenges, but by activating a knowledge set intertwined with a particular educational and linguistic understanding, also necessarily recreates the notion that there exist classes of people subordinate to any other. Before proceeding with her day, Adah’s newly forged individuality reaches its apogee and she thinks, “[h]ad she not now learned to listen to the songs of birds? Was that not one of the natural happenings that inspired her favorite poet, Wordsworth? She might never be a famous poet like

Wordsworth, [...], but Adah was going to train herself to admire the songs of birds however riotous..." (141). Adah identifies with Wordsworth on the level of experience despite Wordsworth, as an upper-class white Briton, seeming to represent the very systems which constantly reduce Adah. Wordsworth is one of the references that Emecheta folds into her narrative to construct a literary community around Adah, which at once helps orient her identity in the present, but also organizes a history and potential future for her based on literature. Wordsworth creates a model of imagination, which Adah appropriates for her own circumstances, recuperating and rearticulating his language of generation, and thereby fashions a new model of authorship and literary community within an urban environment.

In his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth justifies his project by writing about his purpose: "[o]rdinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and [...], to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them [...] the primary laws of nature: [...] as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" (295). Adah engages exactly this model of inspiration and imagination in her encounter with the bird. She enters a "state of excitement" described by Wordsworth upon hearing the birdsong, taking the time to "admire it" (140). Further, just as Wordsworth centers the need to create an association of ideas with artistic inspiration, Adah's thoughts, combined with the narration, trace a series of associations and ideas that lead from the bird to bird in Nigeria, to the state of awareness and imagination in Nigeria, to her own difference from that state, through to her identification and alignment with Wordsworth. Further, by highlighting the grey bird's littleness and unassuming color, she casts the bird as a part of the quotidian, but specifically, a part of the urban quotidian.

The bird's color, its greyness, reflects its urban environment, blurring the division between the "low and rustic life" Wordsworth reaches out to, and Adah's urban reality. Part of Wordsworth's project is to engage with a British heritage that proceeds along twin tracks of language and the land. He writes, "[l]ow and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language" (295). Inherent to Wordsworth's model of inspiration is how "the soil" becomes a space in which passion transforms into poetry – the "plainer and more emphatic language" he cites. Wordsworth is using the country-side and rustic life to appeal to a community who trace their roots to the English soil. By all intents and purpose, this should disqualify Adah from being a part of the conversation Wordsworth begins. Yet, Adah still responds to and reveres Wordsworth by taking the natural – the little grey bird – and situating it within the city: the space where, for Adah and her descendants, the ordinary meets the sublime.

In the same way that Adah transforms and transplants the natural within the urban, she appropriates and revises Wordsworth language of "germination" and "growth" embodying, once again, the role of the source of resistance – becoming another form of "the Mother of Muhammad Ali." Adah appropriates this language, converting it into a different, but analogous form of generation and future growth that she comprehends through her own experience: she uses the language of motherhood. She converts Wordsworth's "mature plants" into her children, and changes the British soil – out of which, what first seemed to be a strictly English identity, but which now becomes a more universally accessible experience grows – into her own fertility and her own femininity.

In the climax of the novel, Adah completes a manuscript, which she titles *The Bride Price*. Adah shows the manuscript to Bill, a former co-worker of hers at the Chalk Farm Library, telling him, “I felt so fulfilled when I finished it, just as if I had just made another baby” (166). Bill responds to her by telling her, “[b]ut that is how writers feel. Their work is their brainchild. This is your brainchild; you are the only one in this whole world who could have produced that particular work, no one else could” (166). Bill’s use of the plural “writers” in addition to his close attention to Adah’s individuality lays out the structure of the alternative community in which Adah ultimately settles. For Adah, the act of writing is linked at once to the creation of her own Self, and also to motherhood and generation. Emecheta’s choice of anchoring Adah’s manuscript with the title “brainchild” operates with the purpose of ensuring Adah’s voice in the future, sustaining a literary community for individuals whose social conditions force them into the periphery.

By adopting a position within the literary community, Adah creates a place for a self-realizing voice that sits equally with the voices of those who previously disregard her subjectivity. However, it is important to note that the alternative, literary community Adah creates is not an ideal one and itself creates and relies upon peripheral communities. The text reveals multiple obstacles to a literary project by an African woman, some of which are external, and some of which are necessary to the text itself. Despite *The Bride Price*’s immense importance to Adah, Francis burns the physical manuscript (170), mirroring an almost identical event from Emecheta’s own life (Interview Citation). In the novel, after Francis burns the manuscript, the novel slips back into free indirect discourse, relating, “Francis was burning her story; [...] [t]he story she

was basing her dream of her becoming a writer upon. The story that she was going to show Titi and Vicky and Bubu and Dada when they grew up” (170). Emecheta lays out the generative power of Adah’s writing, connecting her manuscript to the future. At the same time, however, Francis – embodying the entire structure of hegemonic patriarchy – reveals how easily Adah’s means of community formation and artistic creation can be constricted.

Emecheta’s use of these names is to orient Adah in her experience and performs a double maneuver. On one hand Emecheta allows the African immigrant experience to become a part of a strictly English tradition of self-reliance, perseverance, and industry as encapsulated by Crusoe and Christian. On the other hand, however, Emecheta employs standards of Britishness across racial lines, calling to question the boundaries of “British” literature and showing how those texts that create a particular identity can themselves become subverted and made foreign. When Francis describes the job he takes to make money while Adah recovers from giving birth to Bubu, Emecheta writes, “[Adah] had seen the picture of the man Christian, dressed shabbily like Robinson Crusoe, climbing a steep hill with his staff in his hand huffing and puffing. So this is how Francis would look, the big load on his back [...]” (128). These lines phase Francis out of being a black, male immigrant and reimagine him as the archetypical Englishman – virtuous and self-motivated. This maneuver creates a dialectic surrounding the power exchanges between minority communities and hegemonic systems – in this particular case, systems that grant capital to canonical literature.

Emecheta’s employment of modes of capital, which exploit the “second-class” extend into the very language in which Adah writes. After receiving encouragement from

her co-workers at the Chalk Farm Library about her manuscript of *The Bride Price*, the free indirect speech reads:

[t]here was such a lot, and such a diverse lot, one had to know to be a writer. She could not write in any African language so it must be in English although English was not her mother tongue. Yes it was the English language she was going to use. But she could not write those big long twisting words, but she was going to do her own phrases in her own way. Adah's phrases, that's what they were going to be. (166)

Here, Adah recognizes the capital she activates by writing in English. The imperative “so it must be in English” communicates the dependence on English to align Adah with the “first-class”- the class of literacy. Clive Barnett, as quoted in Grace Low's *Publishing the Postcolonial, Anglophone West African and Caribbean Writing in the UK 1948 – 1968* writes that print culture's purpose was not, “deployed as a medium of mass literacy [but as a] medium of differential, exclusionary colonial subject-formation” (130). Low adds that this exclusionary subject-formation “[applies] to a small segment of the population” (130). By writing in English, Adah reproduces and even exploits the conditions that create the “colonial subject-formation” Barnett references.

Part of Emecheta's project is to create an avenue that interrupts and even interrogates growing sentiments of racism and race-based policies growing in popularity in 1970's Britain. To do so, Emecheta deploys English itself as a tool. When thinking about her own writing, Adah resolves that, “she was going to do her own phrases in her own way. Adah's phrases [...]” she creates the language as a commodity over which she has an authority – an authority which she names for herself, by herself, “Adah's phrases.”

This resolution on Adah's part to commit to an audience beyond her native peoples – which parallels a decision Emecheta herself references in her essay “Feminism with a small ‘f’” when she writes, “I decided to read for a degree that would help me master the English language and help me write about my society for the rest of the world” (174) – also carries a particularly powerful response to one of the anxieties Enoch Powell touches on in his 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech. In one part of his speech, Powell describes an old woman whose street becomes occupied by black immigrants. He says, “They cannot speak English, but one word they know. “Racialist,” they chant. When the new Race Relations Bill is passed, this woman is convinced she will go to prison. And is she so wrong? I begin to wonder” (telegraph). Powell creates a clear separation between immigrants and those who are able to speak English. He also manipulates the apparatus of the state, the same machinery that isolates Adah to the “ghetto” and labels her a “second-class citizen,” into something hostile to native Britons.

Powell's speech came as a response to the Race Relations Bill, 1968, which “would establish in this country equality of treatment in the very sensitive areas of housing and jobs” (Layton-Henry 70). Specifically, the Bill would, “[declare] that discrimination was unlawful on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic group or nationality; secondly, a process a conciliation; and thirdly, enforcement provisions” (72). In November 1968, the Bill was eventually signed into law (72), however the effect Powell's speech had on the electorate created a path for an immigrant-immigrant-unfriendly Tory government, which came to power in the General Election of 1970. In addition to legislative power, Powell's speech had a popular effect in Britain. As Layton-Heath mentions, “[Powell's campaign] raised the salience of race and immigration issues

enormously. They legitimized the expression of gut prejudices and racial hostility which most people thought embarrassing, immoral and even illegal to voice” (76). Layton-Heath continues, “In Powell, popular hostility and prejudice against black immigrants found a national political leader” (76). It is in this context that Emecheta, by writing within the confines of the same market place which exploits the “second-class,” in fact creates a space for black, female, non-Briton writing.

While Emecheta labors to create an argument for a literary community based on a shared literary history and language within her text, the conditions of the literary marketplace that drives that community was opening up to voices from the periphery. As Eric de Bellaigue writes in his essay “British Publishing 1970-2000, How Deregulation and Access to Capital Changed the Rules, “[P]ublishers were enjoying three growth markets: education, information, leisure. They were operating within the publishing cocoon of an ever more dominant English language [...]. Before the 1970s were over, restrictions were dismantled and markets opened” (117). As a writer from the periphery, writing in English to a growing leisure and educational markets, despite being one lacking in symbolic capital, Emecheta filled a demand. Her work falls into what Low, referencing Bourdieu, refers to as the, “restricted production field” (136). *Second Class Citizen* was originally published by Allison and Busby Limited, a publisher, which identifies itself as “Independent Publishers since 1967” (A&B Website). These small-scale publishers, “[value] peer recognition from the initiated, who might see intrinsic value in craftsmanship, and, hence, might publish small runs of esoteric literary work, that, in the main, are not likely to have widespread popular appeal” (137). Within a deregulated literary economy, where publishers found “increasing access to funds” (de

Bellaigue 118), and where small publishers pursued books valued for their content rather than their marketability, Emecheta managed to make the most of converging, opportune factors to being a cultural discussion, which included the voice of the “second-class.”

Second-Class Citizen allows the material conditions of the “second-class” to become immediately legible to the “first class.” This immediacy reconstructs the political prop of the “invading black immigrants” prevalent at the time, and turns them into discrete individuals, which reveals that “second-class” to be one whose suffering is based in lived, material conditions. By sharing the cultural site of fiction, Emecheta collapses the distinction between British and Immigrant heritages, reevaluating the relationship from one of inclusion and exclusion into one of a shared culture. By doing so, even the novel’s title comes into question. Instead of being a narrative of perseverance in the face of oppression, “Second-Class Citizen” instead turns into an ironic brand, which over the course of the novel empties for meaning. While Emecheta’s model of literary community in *Second-Class Citizen* itself creates a border of inclusion and exclusion based on accessibility to education and the “right texts.” That border is intentionally porous, and depends on accumulation rather than exclusion: accumulation of texts and accumulation of experiences. Emecheta recognizes the limitations of the written community, but extends her accumulative communal model into art in general. She writes, “the art of communication, be it in pictures, in music, writing or in oral folklore is vital to the human” (Emecheta “Feminism” 174). Gone is the hierarchy of “second-class” or even the political state of “citizen.” All that is left is the human.

“Who has the best tunes?” Music, Violence, and Abject Communities in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verse*

“What I mean by ‘transgression’ is something completely literal and secular at the same time: that faculty music has to travel, cross over, drift from place to place in a society, even though many institutions and orthodoxies have sought to confine it”

- Edward Said (*Musical Elaborations*)

The characters in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988) lie in the liminal spaces between identities, struggling with how to reconcile the communities which make up their political and cultural subjectivities. Two characters in particular capture the condition of liminality: Mishal and Anahita Sufyan, the daughters of the proprietors of the Shaandaar Café. When introduced to one of the novel’s protagonists, the metamorphosed Saladin Chamcha, Rushdie describes the sisters as, “one spike-haired, the other pony-tailed” wearing “Bruce Lee pajamas worn loosely over T-shirts bearing the image of the new Madonna” (253). In describing the Sufyan daughters – Mishal in particular – Rushdie draws together the elements that allow marginalized communities in the text to negotiate their position on the state’s periphery: violence and music. Rushdie juxtaposes “Bruce Lee” and “the new Madonna,” making the latter’s music inextricably linked to the former’s violence.

Critics traditionally read *The Satanic Verses* as a text negotiating the experience of cultural hybridity, while also exploring the cultural and political fallout of the “The Rushdie affair.” In my own project, I will offer a reading of the kind of intertextual work Rushdie does in the novel to establish his reliance on multiple cultural and literary traditions. Rushdie’s use of multiple traditions creates an equality of traditions that he then enforces through music, which he links to forms of violence – both metaphoric and actual – against the institutionalized forms of power. These institutional forms of power –

“the state” – rely on marginalized communities to define their power and enforce a homogeneity that consolidates the state’s identity. The state turns those marginalized communities on which it relies into what psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva calls “the abject.” The abjection of these communities is linked to the act of cultural consumption and commodification followed by the expulsion of those communities. However, the abject always resists complete erasure, and thus those communities make their presences known through music: a form of cultural production the state cannot control.

Musical production is an exertion of power by marginalized communities, which works in a progression of exerting a community’s presence, then reclaiming a space, violating the space previously claimed by the state, and finally redistributing power. Rushdie explores different communities facing dispossession: from the racially various Club Hot Wax, which reflects the historical relationship between politically and racially dispossessed musical communities in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain and the state, to the prophetess Ayesha, whose revelation in the form of pop songs signs the violation of patriarchal religious spaces. Rushdie establishes a dialectical relationship in his handling of how communities redistribute power. On one hand, Rushdie uses the exiled Imam to simply invert the state-margin relationship, recreating the mechanisms of cultural consumption. On the other hand, Rushdie uses the novel’s other protagonist, Gibreel Farishta and his trumpet, to spread music in the form of fire flowers, burning London, thus creating an equality of how space is distributed.

This equality of space is Rushdie’s ultimate project. As a “major player in the literary market” (Brouillette 84), Rushdie uses his cultural capital to write *The Satanic Verses*, while within *The Satanic Verses*, criticizing the forms of capital he relies on. By

knotting the relationship between “high” and “low” culture, between different cultural and literary traditions, and even through his fugue novelistic form, Rushdie attempts to undo the hierarchy of the literary marketplace. From the inverse position of Buchi Emecheta, Rushdie performs a similar maneuver to *Second-Class Citizen* in his attempt to create an accretive literary tradition through the valuation and highlighting of cultural mélange and literary hybridity.

Central to any reading of Rushdie’s novel is an acknowledgement of the role the city of London plays in the text. “The city” as Rushdie deploys it performs a number of functions, each of which indicate a form of communal fracturing, which underlie Rushdie’s aim to reveal homogenous communities as, in truth, various and irreducibly multiple. Critics have previously discussed metropolitan spaces as the sites of mélange and contamination. Nick Bentley writes, “the postmodern metropolis emphasizes the city as a palimpsest of histories and narratives evoked in the psyche of the observer” (Postmodern Cities 176). Caroline Hibbert, in her essay “Postcolonial Cities” writes, “[t]he city [...] was both a key site for policing relations between the colonizer and the colonized. It was in the city that the ‘imaginary and material spatialities’ of the imperial project intersected” (200). Finally, Azade Seyhan writes, “[p]ositioned in the fold of a paradox that represents both the security of home and inevitability of migration, the city confronts the ethical imperative of settling its inhabitants as it allows for their differences” (The Translated City 216). Because of the generic fluidity of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie manages to touch on each of these, among other, aspects of the city as the locus of heterogeneity. London itself titles two parts of the novel: “Elloven

Deeween” and “A City Visible but Unseen,” and is where Rushdie most visibly narrates the multiplicity and internal divisions of community.

Another site the novel opens up to fracturing and unsettlement is its own form. Aamir Mufti, in his article, “Reading the Rushdie Affair: An Essay on Islam and Politics,” refers to Rushdie’s work as open to, “be[ing] subsumed under the rubric of parody and pastiche” (109). My interest is in the latter, which Mufti defines as: “hybridity or *mélange*, but it is also imitation and citation. [...] it ironically enunciates the signs of the colonizer in order to subvert their meanings” (110). By “colonizer” Mufti means an “original” – the thing being cited – which carries with it symbolic capital: capital, which pastiche, in the form of an imitation, accesses and dissipates. Specifically for *The Satanic Verses*, Mufti writes, “‘pastiche’ refers at the most general level to the novel’s formal equivocation between genres and styles, between realism, psychological realism, the fantastic, the historical novel, journalism, allegory and autobiography” (111). This formal multiplicity reflects the focus on essential multiplicity that underscores the novel.

Using formal variability and by employing myriad genres, Rushdie reveals how apparently “homogenous” communities are, in reality, porous and internally divided. Rushdie employs pastiche and intertextuality to interrogate the Western communities, ranging from the racial to the literary. One of these sites of hybridity is the novel’s sources themselves. The novel’s first line reads, “‘To be born again,’ sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling form the heavens, ‘first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji! To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly’” (3). Rushdie parallels and modifies the beginning of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to highlight the religious and cultural similarities between the Christian tradition Milton writes in and the Islamic tradition Farishta and Rushdie

himself come from. Milton's narrative at the beginning of his poem is a familiar one: rebellious angels are cast out of heaven and land in Chaos where they plot their re-ascension. Rushdie provides the same narrative scaffolding to create a conversation between himself and Milton through Gibreel. He uses the Arabic counterpart to "Gabriel" in addition to the Hindi/Urdu word for "angel" – Farishta – to create a culturally overdetermined connection between his work and Milton.

On the level of content, as well, Gibreel's "singing" mirrors the invocation at the beginning of the poem. Where Gibreel sings about reincarnation and the return to life from death, the invocation at the beginning of the poem reads:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing heavenly muse [...] (1-6)

This invocation that beigns *Paradise Lost* echoes throughout Rushdie's novel, but also more specifically mirrors Gibreel's lines about a return to life after death – what Milton calls *Felix Culpa*, but which Gibreel reframes as the transition from life to death, and then back to life. By having Gibreel sing as he falls from "the heavens" Rushdie creates a direct link with Milton. Further, by keeping Gibreel's name as it appears in the Islamic tradition, Rushdie begins to prise open the assumption that the "Western," Christian belief is distinct from the "Eastern," Islamic one and vice versa.

Traditionally, critics read *The Satanic Verses* as a text struggling with cosmopolitanism, hybridity, and destabilized identity – for individuals and cultures alike. This reading encourages an understanding of the novel as one “about” globalization and the power of transcending international borders. However, as Peter Kalliney, in his article “Globalization, Postcoloniality, and the Problem of Literary Studies in *The Satanic Verses*” writes, “any attempt to read the text as an argument for the usefulness of ‘globalization’ as a critical term must be complicated by the novel’s deployment of historically specific social and political relationships in London during the 1980s” (52). Kalliney criticizes Rushdie’s reliance on localized events to push an internationalist narrative, ultimately stating, “the novel imagines political subjectivity as a way to escape from, rather than attend to, the production of localized social inequality” (76). The “production of localized social inequality” Kalliney refers to is the result of institutional consumption of minority communities, which then erases the communities that fail to reflect state homogeneity and unity – in the case of *The Satanic Verses*, British homogeneity.

This chapter extends critical conversations about community-formation, racial inequality, and hybridity in Rushdie but shifts emphasis to the role of music in *The Satanic Verses*. In the face of political dispossession, ignored communities use music as the instruments to re-exert their political identity in the greater British community. Rushdie introduces music, formally, thematically, and symbolically as a means of cultural production from communities within the state, which the state cannot consume on its own terms, thus turning music into a form of violence and violation against the state and its institutions. Rushdie does so by overtly linking music with violence within

physical and symbolic state spaces. The threat of music is the way music is at once a product of the state: the result of its oppression and attempts at control; and as well that music is the expression of the heterogeneity the state and its institutions attempts to erase. While the state consumes and commodifies cultures and minority identities, music at once works within, disputes, and at times resists being turned into a commodity by the state.

The music that fills a space – physical or metaphoric – makes apparent the presence, and therefore the marginalization of communities the music represents. In her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva creates a useful model through which to understand the relationship between music and the state. Kristeva writes, “from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out” (2). “The sign” Kristeva speaks about is a means of control – the elements of an uncontrollable thing that allows an understanding and therefore control. The abject, however, “without a sign” is “the place where meaning collapses” (2). To the state, music is expression without sign - the uncontrollable, which signals the presence of the “challenging” abject: London’s forgotten, or ignored communities.

A form of the abject Kristeva talks about is nourishment that becomes, “a piece of filth, waste, or dung” (2). In exploring the relationship between the abject and the self, Kristeva writes, “‘I’ abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (3 emphasis hers). Just as nourishment begins as a part of the body, its removal as “waste” is a removal of a piece of the body. Abjected communities within the state exist in the same relationship with the state. For the state, consumption appears in

two ways: firstly, the act of signing communities as “abject,” necessitates those communities as inextricable a part of the state itself. This link reveals the heterogeneous reality of the state, which undermines the state’s narrative of singularity and homogeneity. Secondly, the state and its institutions consume culture to sustain themselves, leaving the lived realities of the communities within the consumed cultures as the “waste”- the thing to be hidden. In the title of the novel’s fifth book: “a City Visible but Unseen,” Rushdie recognizes the double narrative of London that relies on cultural consumption, and then exclusion.

Even within postcolonial studies, music exists in a vexing position just beyond control. In her book *Music and Identity in Postcolonial British South-Asian Literature*, Christin Hoene writes, “[a]s Simon Frith argues, when it comes to how music works in relation to identity, there is no difference between high and low music, art and popular music, or Western and non-Western music” (5). This decentered quality of music is what Said, as I reference in the epigraph to this chapter calls “transgression.” Hoene adopts Said’s use of “transgression” and maps it against a political backdrop. She writes, “[t]he transgressive element is therefore ultimately aesthetic, because it is independent of social formations and circumstantial meaning. Also, it is always political, because the transgressive element in music subverts power structures” (4). Music’s subversive, transgressive power makes it the perfect instrument for Rushdie to employ in creating antagonistic forces against forms of institutionalized power.

One of the most important aspects of music Hoene mentions is how music is, “intrinsically ambivalent and with seemingly contradictory.” Hoene is speaking about different text written by Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, when she writes,

“[m]usic is at the same time affirmative and subversive of ideologies. Rock music in *The Ground Beneath her Feet* is a case in point here, seeing that the novel describes it as a force of political liberation on the one hand and as an agent of cultural imperialism on the other” (6). Music exists in a similarly ambiguous position in *The Satanic Verses*. In *The Verses*, consumption is the mechanism through which one culture subordinates another. In the case of the state and a marginalized community, that consumption comes in the form of commodification: Hoene’s “agent of cultural imperialism.” Music, however, particularly popular music, is made with the intention of being consumed. The intentionality of music’s commodification and consumption that constructs this seeming paradox, however, is the very thing which immunizes music from becoming a tool of marginalization. The state consumes marginalized cultures on its own terms: commodifying them for its own purposes. Its consumption of music happens on the terms of the communities which compose, as Hoene says, inverting the power structure. The presence of music thus becomes the threat of marginalized classes: the stark truth of the fragility of state power.

As the product of the inherent power of the marginalized within a state: both as a reflection of the state itself, and a revelation of the state’s immaterial, music thus exists as a metonym for the marginalized communities themselves, and therefore resists being productively wielded by the state. This fraught relationship appears in the text at the end of Chamcha’s beating in the back of the Black Maria. The officers holding Chamcha are Officer “Jockey” or “Mack” Stein, whose accent Rushdie describes as “exaggeratedly Scottish” (165); Officer “Kim” Novak, and Officer Joe Bruno. In trying to stop the beating he receives from the officers, Chamcha asks the officers to look up who he is, to

which one of the officers replies, “Who’re you trying to kid? [...] Look at yourself. You’re a fucking packy billy. Sally-who? What kind of name is that for an Englishman?” (168). Chamcha refers to the other immigration officers when he responds, “[a]nd what about them? [...] They don’t sound so Anglo-Saxon to me” (168). Officer Novak responds by slapping Chamcha a few times and says to him, “I’m from Weybridge, you cunt. Get it straight: *Wey-bridge*, where the fucking *Beatles* used to live” (169). Following the mention of the Beatles, the officers do in fact “check [Chamcha] out” and discover that Chamcha is, “a British Citizen first class” (169). The abuse stops at the mention of the Beatles. The officers’ assault on Chamcha’s political identity is based in ethnic and racial history: the officers activate the slur “packy” to differentiate themselves ethnically from him. Further, Officer Novak uses the Beatles to emphasize his own Britishness, but he does so in a way that reifies the Beatles from a musical band: the producers of a form of culture that exposes the fact of British multiplicity, into social capital. He cites Weybridge as where the Beatles, “used to *live*” (emphasis mine). The element of actual music that the Beatles made is absent from Novak’s reference, reflecting the relationship of object as without a sign that the state can use to understand – and thus – control music.

My use of “violence” in regards to *The Satanic Verses* is overdetermined. As it appears in the novel, “violence” is the distortion of physical matter – I have defined “violence” thus because moments of violence are often ones of creation as much as ones of destruction. I am also utilizing violence in the symbolic, as a shorthand for violation or the undermining of authority. It is important to address the difference that exists between state control and control through cultural and social capital. The former stems from

political and institutional power, whereas the latter is the result of forms of social oppression – through racism, misogyny, heteronormativity, etc. While the two are closely linked, often existing as the same entity, writing in the context of the Thatcher years, Rushdie is careful to create a distinction between the two. By preserving a gap between communities of state power and those of social power, Rushdie deploys textual figures of music as a means of defying strictly institutionalized, state control.

Against the apparatus of state power wielding the Beatles as a metonym for authority, Rushdie also employs music to create room for marginalized communities within the state by reimagining sections of London infused with music as storehouses for political unrest and violence against the state. One of these communities is the racially unrepresented crowd in the volatile, violent space of the Club Hot Wax, where DeeJay Pinkwalla raps about the erasure of the history of the ethnic others in British history. Pinkwalla's uses his lyrics to extend the irreducible heterogeneity of race and into Britishness itself, making a claim for British political identity as containing a foreign element from the very start. Pinkwalla raps, "*Now-mi-feel-indignation-when-dem-talk-immigration-when-dem-make-insinuation-we-no-part-a-de-nation-an-mi-make-proclamaiton-a-de-true-situation-how-we-make-contribution-since-de-Rome-occupation*"(301). Pinkwalla's lyrics are a moment when Rushdie relies on the fluid form of his novel, shifting into fused, running rap lyrics, to reflect the real circumstances of instability within communities he imagines. Pinkwalla's lyrics recuperate the place of "immigrants" as an ancient part of the British landscape dating back to "*de-Rome-occupation,*" inciting violence against a British history narrated by the state.

Rushdie uses form to erase the distinction between music and violence against the state, not only in broad ideological terms, but also in the “localized moment” Kalliney notes. To do so, Rushdie invokes contemporary political figures whose physical representations are violated, completing the line of violence from music to an overdetermined violence against the state. Through his diction, and through shifts in genre, Rushdie recreates and then inverts the colonial relationship, turning the state from an entity which consumes minority communities, into the thing consumed. The club’s main event is the selection of a wax figure, which is then melted down in a “man-sized, glass-fronted, internally-illuminated” microwave oven (302). Pinkwalla leads the crowd in selecting a figure to microwave. He begins by announcing: “*so-it-meltdown-time-when-de-men-of-crime-gonna-get-in-line-for-some-hell-fire-frying*” (302). He then turns to the audience, “arms wide, feet with the beat” and asks, “[w]ho’s-it-gonna-be? Who-you-wanna-see?” (302). The crowd responds, “*Maggie-Maggie-Maggie [...] Burn-burn-burn*” (302). The man-sized microwave and Pinkwalla’s use of “*hell-fire-frying*” turns the club’s melting ritual into a consumption of the state. Melting the figure of Margaret Thatcher allows the Club Hot Wax community to commit violence against the state through the consumption of a figure who uses state power to commodify and exploit those communities. The crowd’s response of “*Maggie-Maggie-Maggie [...] Burn-burn-burn*” uses form to complete the link between music and violence. The crowd’s response appears identically to Pinkwalla’s rap, where the distance between words is compromised in favor of maintaining the song’s rhythm.

The relationship between music communities – particularly music from poor and minority communities – and the British political establishment in England in the 1970s

and 1980s was fiercely contested. That period of British politics oversaw the rise of punk, heavy metal, and dub all of which represented and vocalized the anxieties of marginalized British communities. Critics have acknowledged the tension between marginalized communities and the British state: Andrew Blake, in his book *The Land Without Music*, writes, “[i]n Hebride’s view, British subcultures are engaged in a long imaginary ‘phantom dialogue’ with Black American and Caribbean culture, a dialogue focused around dress and music, and embracing the marginality of those cultures against mainstream white culture” (97). One of the main sites of contention between these communities – particularly the former two – and the political establishment was how images of political figures were used in public, for instance, the cover to the Sex Pistols’s single “God Save the Queen” (1977). Three years later, Iron Maiden released their single “Sanctuary,” the cover for which depicts the band’s mascot, Eddie, knife in hand, crouched over the body of Margaret Thatcher. When talking about the album art, Iron Maiden manager Rod Smallwood said, “The artwork is very tongue in cheek, as usual. At that time, Maggie had visited the old USSR and, following her tough stance with them, had been christened the Iron Maiden. Eddie took offence to this, and even more so when she started taking our posters” (*Run to the Hills* 148). Iron Maiden – out of London’s East End – were motivated by similar forms of state consumption as the novel’s minority racial communities. While Iron Maiden and the Sex Pistols represented class dissention, in the Club Hot Wax, Rushdie represents the relationship between music and the British political establishment had in the 1970s and 1980s, this time however, with the lines of contention redrawn to include racial and colonial tensions.

Rushdie employs music as a form of cultural recuperation as well as community violence against the state. By layering his writing with reference and intertext, Rushdie activates the embrace of marginality: the “phantom dialogue” with African American and Caribbean communities Blake cites, while also activating music as a means of cultural recuperation in addition to one of political recuperation. Once the Thatcher figure melts, Rushdie narrates, “she is a puddle, and the crowd sighs in ecstasy: *done*. ‘The fire this time,’ Pinkwalla tells them. Music regains the night” (302). This passage makes two literary connections to authors writing from within marginalized cultural and political contexts. First, Pinkwalla’s apocalyptic utterance, “the fire this time” comes originally from the Bible, but simultaneously draws a clear link to James Baldwin’s book *The Fire Next Time*. Similarly, the sexual undertone of the crowd’s reaction after the melting – “ecstasy” followed by “*done*” – operates on a second, aesthetic register. The italicized “done” that comes from the crowd is similar to, but separate from how Rushdie arranges Pinkwalla’s lyrics. That being said, the same isolated, italicized “done” appears at the end of “Sirens” in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (11.1295). Rushdie’s links to Baldwin and “Sirens” underscores the importance of music in the community’s apotropaic ritual that at once compromises institutional power, and also works to reverse colonial cultural consumption. Just like the communities in the Club Hot Wax, Joyce and Baldwin, both come from backgrounds of political and cultural dispossession under state rule – Baldwin as an African American, Joyce as Irish in the British Empire. Both Joyce and Baldwin exploit the cultural capital of their own references – Baldwin taking from the Bible, Joyce from musical composition. Rushdie then uses music to reactivate Joyce and Baldwin within their original contexts as authors marginalized in the state to allow the community

in the Club Hot Wax to claim to capital whose ownership cultural institutions attempt to appropriate.

In addition to contending and subverting state power, music in Rushdie also violates assumptions that authoritarian discourses of the institutions of state – including religiosity and indeed state secularism – can reinforce the superiority of certain forms of cultural exchange over others, where music sits below sanctioned forms of cultural exchange. Rushdie activates music in the text is to criticize forms of institutional hierarchy. To do so, he uses and then parodies narratives of religious revelation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes a passing reference to music in her essay “Reading *The Satanic Verses*.” Spivak writes, “the feel of the voice speaking through one, is high on the register of validity, if not verifiability [...] Ayesha, the female prophet (‘historically’ one of [Mahound’s] wives), lacks the existential depth of ‘the businessman’ prophet. To her the archangel sings in popular Hindi film songs. Her traffic with him is reported speech” (252). By considering the archangel’s pop songs during his revelation to Ayesha, Rushdie in fact empowers Ayesha as an equal to Mahound. The presence of the pop songs create an alternative form of prophet that compromises the integrity of revelation in institutional Islam – thereby compromising the integrity of the religion itself as an institution.

Ayesha’s revelation is another form of pastiche through which Rushdie deploys music (here, pop songs) to contest the colonizing male apocryphal narrative and thereby create an equal prophet from a marginalized community – in this case, from female figures in the text. Music becomes the contaminating element, in Ayesha’s revelation – the thing that compromises the “verisimilitude” Spivak refers to. Where Gibreel imparts Quranic verse – divine and satanic alike – to Mahound, he similarly reveals verses of

political recuperation to Ayesha. Thus, the fact of Ayesha's revelation coming in the form of popular songs only enhances the transgressive nature of revelation to a female. The passage Spivak cites follows Ayesha's order to the pilgrims to stone a baby born out of wedlock. Skeptic and zamindar (landowner) Mirza Saeed, takes the growing disillusionment following the stoning as an opportunity to challenge Ayesha's power over the pilgrims. He asks her where she receives her revelation from, to which she replies, "[Gibreel] speaks to me [...] in clear and memorable forms" (511). After pressing the matter, Ayesha admits that the archangel sings, "to the tunes of popular hit songs" (512). The pilgrims begin to mock Ayesha's revelation – one pilgrim in particular, Osman the bullock-boy begins, "singing the latest filmi ganas and making nauch-girl eyes. 'Ho ji! He carolled. 'this is how Gibreel recites, ho ji! Ho ji!'" (512). The rest of the pilgrims join in the dancing and laughing, "until the Imam came running to shriek at the ungodliness of their deeds" (512). Rushdie links "filmi ganas" – songs from Bollywood films – to femininity through the "nauch girl eyes" Osman makes. Therefore, the Imam's disconcertion at "the ungodliness of their deeds" becomes the recognition of the centering of the authority of a female-led, and therefore un-Islamic, community on mosque grounds.

Rushdie's handling of music follows a movement from its production, to it becoming an enactment of violence – as it does in the Club Hot Wax; to it becoming the means of reclaiming physical and symbolic space – as seen in Ayesha's revelation; leading finally to the consumption of music being synonymous with the consumption by music – as I will show through Gibreel's role in the London race riots. By forcing the state to acknowledge its existence – music irrefutably challenges the narrative of

homogeneity the state and the institutions within the state endorse. Music thus redistributes the power within the state, allowing the communities that produce music to become their own forms of authority. Here, Rushdie offers two possible ways by which marginalized communities can exert their new power: communities can become institutionalized, and re-inscribe the state's mechanisms of consumption: as Rushdie shows with the revolution in Dosh. Alternatively, minority communities can use music as the means to level the state, as Rushdie depicts in another moment of public violence: the London race riots.

One culture's imposition on another through consumption is a way by which communities exert power over, or violence against other each other. Within the text, this cultural consumption becomes the means through which characters can use music as a means of violation and violence. For state and institutions, this consumption is the reification of culture into commodity. For marginalized communities, the creation of uncontrollable culture is a violation against systems of capital. In *The Satanic Verses*, the commodification inverts the power structure in the colonial transaction: shifting autonomy out of the colonizer's possession, forcing its consumption on the terms of the colonized. This means, however, that the violence of music is available to every socially marginalized community, provided a means of production. While in London, the exiled Imam becomes a form of reclamation through consumption, just as the crowd in the Club Hot Wax does; his goal, however is to become the state power – the claim to total political agency.

Rushdie uses the recurring motif of metamorphosis to imbue music as a dangerous, double-sided tool. Before claiming state power the Imam leads a rebellion

from his sanctuary in London: one incited through the music of one of his follower's voice. Rushdie writes, "the American convert is singing the Imam's holy song. Bilal the muezzin: his voice enters a ham radio in Kensington and emerges in the dreamed-of Dosh, transmuted into the thunderous speech of the Imam himself" (216). After listing the sins committed by the Empress of Dosh, Bilal continues by, "issuing in ringing tones the Imam's nightly call to his people to rise up against the evil of her State. 'We will make a revolution,' the Imam proclaims through him" (216-217). Rushdie makes the music of Bilal's voice inseparable from the Imam's message of revolution to such a point that the message and the music become inextricable.

The radio messages reappear in a later moment, after the Imam and Gibreel are transposed to Dosh and the revolution is in progress: what Rushdie calls, "a revolution of radio hams" (219). Like much of the novel, Rushdie's language, his use of "radio hams" specifically here, operates on multiple levels. On the surface, the revolution is one spread through the radio. "Radio hams" also carries the connotation of a speaker enthralled by their own performance. "Ham," however also links the Imam's revolution to consumption. Ham, in traditional Islam is a forbidden meat. For the revolution to be one of "radio hams," Rushdie twists the connotation of "ham" and makes the Imam's song a violence against Dosh; a violence which is consumed and then enacted by the revolutionaries.

Rushdie then employs the figure of the Imam to reflect how states lose control of music, while themselves enforcing control through consumption. While transmitting his music for the people of Dosh to consume, in London, the Imam restricts his own consumption: remaining unviolated by Britishness. He chooses to relate ambivalently to

London – both within the city, but also perpetually surrounded by bodyguards blocking his view (213). The Imam does, however, participate in economic consumption: Rushdie describes the Imam as never cooking; he writes, “the dark-spectacled bodyguards go out for take-away” (215). Buying “take-away” allows the Imam to consume and then discard the British culture, both as bodily waste and trash. Further, the water the Imam drinks comes from “an American filtration machine” (215) – removing anything except the element of water itself from what he puts in his body. After the revolution, however, the Imam, as Desh’s new leader, consumes the people of Desh themselves, ingesting every aspect of the culture for control. Rushdie describes the Imam as, “grown monstrous, lying in the palace forecourt with his mouth yawning open at gates; as the people march through the gates he swallows them whole” (221). The Imam solidifies his position as the body of orthodoxy, becoming an entity of consumption, sustaining himself on the bodies and the culture of Desh.

The antithesis to the Imam’s revolution comes in the form of Gibreel Farishta walking through London with his trumpet Azraeel. In the lead up to the race riots, police arrest Uhuru Simba, a leader in the black community in London, in connection with the Granny Ripper murders. Simba dies in custody, after which the Granny Ripper strikes again. In response, London police “quadruples” its presence, to which Hanif Johnson, a representative for London’s colored communities, replies that the increased police presence is “provocative and incendiary” (466). Rushdie narrates that, “at the Shaanaar and the Pagal Khana there began to assemble groups of young blacks and Asian determined to confront the cruising panda cars” (466). The two restaurants: the Shaandaar Café and the Pagal Kahana are the loci out of which minority communities

begin to empower themselves in the face of the state – a maneuver Rushdie elaborates by changing the police cruisers into “panda cars” – all at once imposing the mix of blackness and whiteness and also Western and Eastern cultures onto the reality of the state.

Rushdie employs a narrative parallax to describe the riots in London, shifting perspective, and therefore narrative authority from the state to Gibreel as he creates music, thus reclaiming the space of London itself. Rushdie introduces both perspectives through parallel uses of a colon, first writing, “[t]his is what the television camera sees:” (469), and later, “Gibreel:” (472). As the riot spreads, the narration focalizes around news cameras, which center the actions of police officers as they raid the Club Hot Wax and make arrests. Rushdie closes any distance between instruments of the news and instruments of state authority when he writes, “[a] helicopter hovers over the nightclub, urinating light in long golden streams; the camera understands this image. The machine of state bearing down upon its enemies. – And now there’s a camera in the sky [...] and from another helicopter a news team is *shooting down*” (469 Emphasis Rushdie’s). The media helicopters and the police helicopters, linked through the use of “shooting,” where laying bare the very presence of alterior spaces in the city through the media is the revelation of the abject. The helicopters link the public consumption of the images of minority communities as dangerous or undesirable, and the state apparatuses of cultural consumption – thus erasure – rendering the two identical.

Rushdie positions Gibreel in tension with the state, shifting narrative focus from the consumption of minority communities to the consumption of the city through the music he plays. Gibreel walks through London playing the trumpet, and while doing so, breathing fire out onto the city’s infrastructure. While traditionally the name of the Angel

of Death itself, Rushdie turns the trumpet into an instrument of death that Gibreel turns on London. From the trumpet, Gibreel breathes “little buds of flame” (477), which, “dance upon the concrete, needing neither combustible material nor roots” (477). As he blows the rainbow fire flames onto the London infrastructure, Rushdie describes the city’s transformation as, “like watching a luminous garden, its growth accelerated many thousand times, a garden blossoming, flourishing, becoming overgrown [...] a garden of dense intertwined chimeras” (477). Gibreel’s breathes fire with the purpose of “cleansing” and “purging” the city (476). The fire is the trumpet’s music, spreading and consuming the city. Thus, everywhere Gibreel spreads his fire flowers becomes a space where the fact of the marginalized communities in London – the formerly consumed – becomes apparent. The music contends for London’s public spaces with the police presence, resulting in an all-consuming, apocalyptic riot.

The city’s transformation into a flaming garden resolves an earlier tension Rushdie establishes about the city. In “A City Visible but Unseen,” Gibreel sees London “through an angel’s eyes” where he sees, “essences instead of surfaces” (331). The essence of London he sees is, “a city [...] stifled and twisted by the insupportable, unrejected burden of its past, staring into the blackness of its impoverished future” (331). London’s struggle stems from its relationship with its abject populations, whose erasure is “the insupportable, unrejected burden” London struggles with, and whose uncontrollability is “its impoverished future.” By using “impoverished,” Rushdie acknowledges the impossibility of a cultural economy based solely on consumption – a future which comes to bear during the riot when Gibreel’s music spreads uncontrollably.

In addition to a critique of institutions reliant on cultural consumption to enforce hierarchy, Rushdie folds in an examination of the dominant literary community – with which Rushdie attempts to position himself ambivalently: within and without. The novel conducts this examination of the literary throughout, but one that becomes especially prescient during the riot. The fire flowers Gibreel breathes are not only a manifestation of the counter consumption of the state, but are also the consumption and repurposing of institutional literacy. The image of “buds of flame” reactivates and recontextualizes William Blake’s short book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by merging metonyms of Heaven and Hell. Rushdie, while having Gibreel consume the physical space of London, uses the same instrument to consume the literary space Blake occupies. Through his use of reference, pastiche, and the *mélange* of different literary traditions, Rushdie appears to be positioning his own novelistic project in line with Gibreel’s devastating conflagration of London: a project of leveling and reclaiming space on behalf of subjugated communities.

And yet, while Rushdie’s handling of music and narrative form would seek to reconfigure the boundaries of community and the lines of inclusion and exclusion within urban spaces, we still need to understand how the author’s project relates to his celebrated, even elite position within the literary marketplace. The reality of Rushdie’s cultural capital as a Booker-prize winning author is inescapable and bears exploring, even as it appears in the text. Sarah Brouillette, in her book *Postcolonial Writers in the Literary Marketplace* questions Rushdie along these lines, writing, “through a consideration of some aspects of Rushdie’s case, what I wonder here is whether it is absolutely impossible to ever simply oppose the circumstances of one’s career as a

writer” (82). Brouillette argues, “[Rushdie] admit[s] to complicity in building the trajectory of his own career, while still managing to challenge those forces that are [...] ultimately related to [his] own celebrification and demonization” (83).

Rushdie’s challenge to the forces of capital come through the roles he gives himself in the text, and his use and recontextualization of intertext and reference, which democratizes literary and cultural traditions. Rushdie appears in the text twice through the dual personas of: the ambiguous deity “*ooparvala* or *nee chayvala*” (329), who composes the text and is the embodiment of the transnational, hyper-literate narrative voice; and “Salman the Persian,” who records and then compromises the prophet Mahound’s “Word” (329). This pair of doubled fictionalized authors – one with absolute authority, and the other without a home – make the case for Rushdie’s ambivalence in the literary marketplace: an author writing from inside and outside the established literary marketplace.

While Rushdie creates the author-characters in discrete moments in the text, his other project: the one creating an equality of literatures, begins from the first page in the moment I cite earlier when he invokes Milton. By establishing the novel on a platform made up of violence through the *Bostan*’s explosion; music from Gibreel’s literal singing, which Rushdie refers to as a “gazel” (3); and the fracturing of the homogenous British literary community, Rushdie levels the charge of, and reveals the fallacy of literary exclusion. Recall that *The Satanic Verses* begins with Gibreel and Saladin re-staging the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, with Gibreel cast as Milton’s singing “heavenly muse.” Rushdie fastidiously catalogues the debris from the plane for ensure the preservation of the violence predicating the scene. After listing material objects such as “drinks trolleys”

and “duty-free video games,” Rushdie writes, “there had been more than a few migrants aboard, yes...” (4) before describing the destruction of the bodies and selves of those falling migrants. The violence brought on by the plane’s explosion is two-fold, a maneuver Rushdie makes by underlying the scene with Milton’s poem: Rushdie reveals the violence of the cultural erasure caused by literary hierarchy, a violence signed by the fractured, falling migrant body parts; at the same time, Rushdie enacts his own violence against the same hierarchization of the literary establishment, by fusing Milton’s Word with popular music, by making Gibreel use the refrain “Ho ji! Ho ji!”- words which Osman the bullock boy repeats while ridiculing Aeysha.

While walking through the burning city, Gibreel’s thinks, “[w]hat does a poet write? Verses. What jingle-jangle in Gibreel’s brain? Verses” (474). The echo of “verses” throughout the novel, not only as poetry, but as “jingle-jangle” suggests, music, turning the novel *The Satanic Verses* itself into violence against institutional power: in this case, a literary marketplace that relies on the subordination of some forms of literature to others. By drawing from myriad sources and text, Rushdie mirrors Emecheta’s model of literary accumulation, however, Rushdie recognizes the cost of his argument. A redistribution of capital in the global literary marketplace signals the end of the institution of “English” literature: a thought he gives expression to in his essay “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist.” Rushdie writes:

As far as Eng. Lit. itself is concerned, I think that if *all* English literatures could be studied together, a shape would emerge which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the world, and we would see that Eng. Lit. has never been in better shape, because the world language now also possesses a world

literature, which is proliferating in every conceivable direction (*Imaginary Homelands* 70).

By predicating his novel on hybridity and multiplicity, Rushdie eradicates the same literary hierarchy he depends on to exert his cultural capital. He performs the same democratizing maneuver Emecheta does in *Second-Class Citizen*, but himself from the inverse position of critical inclusion rather than Emecheta's, which was of opportune dispossession. By writing in his "chimeras of form," Rushdie makes the case not only for cultural, but also literary variability and multiplicity.

“A language she’d stopped being able to speak:” Gaps, Language and the Failure of
Community in Zadie Smith’s *NW*

*“I was expected to be an expert on multicultural affairs, as if multiculturalism is a genre
of fiction or something”*

- Zadie Smith

In Zadie Smith’s *NW* (2012), one of the four protagonists, Felix Cooper is buying a car that he intends to fix up and resell as part of his plan to improve his living conditions. While examining the car, Smith’s narration highlights gaps and spaces in the car’s body. First, Felix notes “[f]rog-eye headlamps, manic grille grin. One eyed in this case. He touched the spot where the badge should be. When the time came it would be a silver octagon with the two letters back to back dancing” (140). Smith’s catalogue of tears and cuts in the car’s body continues as she talks about “the giant slash in the soft top,” a missing plastic window, and the car’s model stamped on the rear bumper: “M DGET” (141). The car Felix is planning on buying is a red MG Midget. Smith’s narration is preoccupied with the gaps and empty spaces on the car: what she refers to as a “slash” in the roof, and the incomplete lettering that labels the vehicle. The scene featuring the MG is a double maneuver on Smith’s part. At once, she represents the shifting sociopolitical British landscape, employing the car’s British heritage to recreate the centering and growing inclusion within the idea of “Britishness.” Smith writes from a historical moment, where social inclusion was a major part of British political policy, courtesy of the New Labour regime, which came to power in 1997. Smith also recreates the transactionary understructure that makes up the neoliberal New Labour ideology of

self-determined social mobility in minority communities by framing Felix's interaction with the MG as a purchase.

The second maneuver Smith performs is a revelation of the failure of language: particularly written language. The missing badge and the missing "I" in the model stamp gesture towards the gap in meaning that exists in language, and what is represented in language. One of the realms Smith explores in her critique of neoliberalism, is the representation of a community, either through individuals from that community, or through language, which only works to re-inscribe forms of political and subjective exclusion. This re-inscription is the result of the state committing to improving conditions within marginalized communities without offering substantive means of improving those conditions, choosing instead to defer the responsibility to localized communities themselves. The compromised conditions minority communities continue to exist in cause individuals from those communities to search elsewhere for belonging, particularly as they experience upward social mobility, but find themselves between communities: no longer marginalized, but also not entirely centered.

In her exploration of alternative forms of community, Smith extends the conversations Emecheta and Rushdie engage in their works. Smith looks first to generation and maternity, and then to communities of music: both of which she mediates through characters' nostalgia. This nostalgia, however is flawed and characters in the text remain isolated from one another as they navigate their respective communities and the fractures in their own subjectivities. Given the failure of nostalgic forms of community, Smith then entertains the notion of how community, and the representations of community enact systemic and epistemological forms of violence against the

communities themselves, and that any form of representation through language is bound to fail. Smith uses her novel's form, and recurrent gaps in the narrative to draw the reader's attention to the gaps in language. I argue that Smith's use of those gaps, along with the recurrent violence those gaps expose the failure of the idea of "community" entirely. Rather, I argue that Smith proposes a model of community based on exclusion and individuality that stem from Heideggarean notions of being: "*Dasein*." This model of community, however is based in a recognition and acceptance of a separation an individual from themselves, along with a recognition and communication of that gap in interiority in another. Ultimately, Smith's project is not only an examination of community, but an embrace of its failures in the post-New Labour, xeno-racist moment.

The post- New Labour moment is characterized by a shift in the British government's handling of marginalized communities. Through the 20th century, individuals from minority communities existed in antagonistic political situations, categorized first by anti-immigrant sentiment curated by Enoch Powell, and later, by immigrant-unfriendly policies espoused by the Thatcher administration. Both Emecheta and Rushdie, therefore situated themselves in dialogue as antagonistic voices against the British institutional racism. Smith, however, writes in a different context: one which centers inclusion and diversity. In 1997, Britain's Labour Party, called "New Labour," "embraced – or at least tried to manage – cultural diversity and has placed institutional racism on the political agenda" (Back et al. 445). After further investigation, however, Back et al. conclude that, "at the heart of what has become the New Labour project lies an uncertainty about the challenge contemporary multiculturalism poses to the very constitution of the polity of the nation" (447). The "uncertainty" Back et al. mention is

the result of a proliferation of commitments New Labour made to the British electorate. They write, “[New Labour’s] flirtations with multicultural democracy are combined, when opportune, with appeals to the remnants of racially exclusive nationalism and the phantoms of imperial greatness” (452). The New Labour British state looks at once to appear open to a diversifying population, but the same time, eager to remain a part of a lineage of exclusionary politics.

The mechanism through which New Labour employs its ambivalent status in British society is to localize the burden of social progress within communities, allowing the government to remain “fiscally prudent in terms of overall public expenditure” (447). Back et al. establish a tension between the representational progress minority communities enjoyed and the stasis of those minority communities when the financial burden of progress was passed onto the local scale. Further, they write, “[o]ne of the most tangible ways in which New Labour attempted to pursue the ‘diversity agenda’ was through honours and peerages” (449). My interest in New Labour’s efforts to appear inclusive is how the scheme results in a system of social semiotics – a cultural metonymy. By this, I mean that New Labour relied on a system of representation – a “language”- to reflect meaningful progress towards true inclusion for entire communities at a time rather than funding or ethical investment into minority communities.

Within this context, Black British authorship had been, according to Stuart Hall in the 1980s, “centered at last” (19 quoted in Arana). R. Victoria Arana further writes about the place of Black British writing in the 1990s and early 2000s, saying that, “black Britons were writing emphatically about how the general culture must change to accommodate black British citizens and their lifestyles” (32). By being able to force the

culture in general towards a model friendlier to black British culture, the centeredness Black Britons were experiencing encouraged a greater, more visible literary output. As Arana writes, “[t]he most recently published non-fiction, novels, and poetry fully manifested the centeredness that Stuart Hall had noted and described” (33). Within this miscellany [new cannon?] of Black British writers, Arana describes Smith’s *White Teeth* as, emphasizing “*belonging to a new society*” (33). Eight years later, when Smith published *NW*, her focus had shifted away from belonging, towards a more complete exploration of subjecthood and individuality.

Black British writing in the neoliberal context exists in a state of anxiety with the greater British sociopolitical landscape. In her book *Chimeras of Form: Modernist Internationalism Beyond Europe, 1914-2016*, Aarthi Vadde describes the opening scene in *NW*, and looks closely at Leah’s circumstances while she reclines in the hammock. Vadde writes, “the dual assaults of welfare and cosmopolitanism turn out to be red herrings for the real problem, which is, of course, the liberal individualism of Englishness itself” (205). Vadde places *NW* in direct tension with the neoliberal British identity: an identity she is critical of, writing, “[*NW*] takes the comprehensive and the totalizing as objects of analysis rather than analytical givens. It attends to the ways in which the processes designated by neoliberalism are not as coherent as our critical language implies, even if they are aptly described as systematic” (201). What Vadde is gesturing towards here, is Smith’s use of form to scrutinize the mechanisms of neoliberalism. Smith calls *NW* “a novel,” yet she takes the uniform of the “The Novel” and splinters it to allow readers to fully examine the mechanisms of neoliberalism.

The novel's form is inherently linked with the novel's plot. *NW* revolves around four primary characters: Leah Hanwell, Felix Cooper, Keisha Blake, who later changes her name to Natalie, and Nathan Bogel. Structurally, Smith divides the novel into five separate sections: "Visitation," "Guest," "Host," "Crossing," and a second "Visitation," where each section follows a discrete set of organizational and structural rules. On the level of plot, "Visitation" and "Guest" revolve around Felix's murder in the days leading up to Carnival. "Crossing" tracks Natalie as she leaves her and Frank's home and walks with Nathan to her old neighborhood directly following Frank's discovery of Natalie's online activity. The second "Visitation" brings together Leah and Natalie in the aftermath of carnival, when Natalie turns Nathan in to the police for Felix's murder. Formally, Smith employs a fractured, discontinuous narrative form that Wendy Knepper, in her essay "Revisionary Modernism and Postmillennial Experimentation in Zadie Smith's *NW*," calls, "a spatially configured story" (112). Knepper continues to describe Smith's use of form as a, "spatial poetics, which requires new reading practices, [where] Smith embraces experimentation in order to express alternative, ethically-oriented constructions of locality in a globalizing world" (112).

The spatiality of the novel spans two distinct forms of space: the urban and social. It is within her dealing with space that Smith lays bare the failures of post-New Labour multiculturalism to show how minority representation in public comes at the cost of preserving and then re-inscribing the mechanisms of social and political marginalization in private. She sets up moments where individuals from minority communities perform metonymic functions, and become representative for entire communities at once, reducing the social and political subjectivities, not only of the communities, but of the

individuals as well. These relationships between truly centered and seemingly centered communities take on different forms depending on the space these communities are visible in, but always become reduced to sole representatives of their entire communities.

Smith juxtaposes formally parallel moments in her text across the novel, establishing a tension between the language of multiculturalism, and its material effects, thus making visible the failures of New Labour's social metonymy. Smith uses space to reveal the division between the functions "representatives" of minority communities perform in public spaces, and the private conditions of individuals in the community apparent only at home. Rather, Smith draws the reader's attention to complicity in the part of the individuals from marginalized communities who experience the desired upward mobility New Labour encouraged, at the cost of crystalizing the circumstances that other community members continue to live in. The presence and conditions of the minority peoples inhabiting public spaces [or "work to"] reflect the success and sociopolitical possession those communities have when seen from the exterior. The social metonymy justifies an unawareness of the lived conditions of minority communities and becomes the mechanism through which British neo-liberalism maintains the social and political dispossession of those marginalized communities.

Smith constructs a dialectic based on space in "Host," where she burdens Natalie specifically, with a charge of political vacancy, which supports the system of social metonymy she succeeds in while her family remains socially stagnant. In *135. Contempt*, Natalie and Francis share a long meal with their Southeast Asian friends: Imran and Ameeta, which starts as brunch, but "tipped into lunch" (300). In the middle of "ironically" discussing celebrity gossip which deals with an actress adopting, "a child of

every race. She's like the United Nations of Stupid" (299), Smith writes, "'I never know what's reasonable,' said Imran. 'Ten percent? Fifteen? Twenty?'" Global consciousness. Local consciousness. Consciousness. And lo they saw their nakedness and were not ashamed" (299-300). Further on, Smith writes, "they were all four of them providing a service for the rest of the people in the café, simply by being here. They were the 'local vibrancy' to which estate agents referred. [...] they needn't concern themselves too much with politics. They simply *were* political facts, in their very persons" (300 Emphasis Smith's). The function the four friends perform in the café is to be visible to the rest of the guests. By simply being, the four in the café were enough to signal the upward mobility minority communities in Britain were enjoying in the post-New Labour world.

Smith repeats the word "consciousness," reducing the scope of the word with each repeat, using parataxis to equalize the "global," "local," and an unmediated, personal "consciousness." She shows the equivalency to be false, however, paring the amplified "consciousness" with the line: "lo they saw their nakedness and were not ashamed." "Consciousness" appears earlier in the novel, where Smith intentionally draws attention to the word's double meaning as not only physically awake, but also invested in social change. In the novel's second section, "Guest," the section's main character, Felix Cooper describes his girlfriend to a former casual lover, Annie, telling her, "she knows that she's about. She's conscious" (179). Annie replies, "that's setting the bar rather low, don't you think? I mean bully for you she's not in a coma..." (179). Felix laughs and responds, "[p]olitically conscious, racially conscious, as in she gets it, the struggle. Conscious" (179).

Smith here lays out the two forms of “consciousness” that operate within the novel, and suggests an internal tension in the word where one meaning – political consciousness – is active, while the other – being awake – reflects a passivity: a void of autonomy. Her repetition of the word in “Host” allows Smith to level a charge of complacency and complicity against individuals from communities suffering from material and political dispossession.” Smith unveils how, for minorities in increasingly gentrified neighborhoods – ones where real estate agents use “local vibrancy” as a selling point – everyday life within neo-liberal structures empties individuals of political autonomy, reducing them to their functions within the housing market and urban market. Smith levels a charge of complicity against the culprits of the post-New Labour world: the group at the table who willingly appear as representatives of the success of their home communities.

At the same time that Smith implicates the four friends for their embrace of their social function at the expense of their communities in general. She reviews their embrace of their becoming “political facts” rather than political entities: a claim she stages as an interaction between Frank and a waiter at the beginning of the section. In doing so, however, Smith implicates herself and her own project in relying on similar maneuvers, where her writing becomes a function of “political fact” rather than a political action. *Contempt* begins with the lines, “[t]he eggs came late. Frank argued chummily with the waiter until they were taken off the bill. At one point employing the phrase: ‘Look, we’re both educated brothers’” (298). Frank’s glibness – evoked through the Smith’s use of “chumminess”- and his facetious suggestion of similar educations between himself and the waiter creates a false communal parity between Frank and the waiter. However,

Smith leaves the Waiter's reactions and dialogue undisclosed, erasing his input in the transaction, while at the same time, having him bear the monetary cost of the eggs rather than the affluent Frank. In doing so, Smith acknowledges the inability her own writing has to represent the challenges and struggles of individuals within marginalized communities. She further recognizes her own use of those individuals in fashioning space for herself within the literary marketplace. The "nakedness" Smith refers to later, therefore becomes the table's, and her own, recognition that their own political and social visibility relies on the exploitation and erasure of other, even more marginalized individuals – Frank's "bothers" and is made unforgivable by the fact that they "were not ashamed."

Smith incorporates elements of the scene in café in an earlier moment of the text but changes the scene's setting, shifting into the private. In *131. Revisit*, Natalie, after establishing herself as a barrister, returns to the estate to visit with her mother. As a result of Smith's parallel uses of language in the two scenes, she reveals the opposing side of the social dialectic minority communities exist in: their representation in public and the reality that exists in private. Now, however, Smith reveals the true conditions of minority communities. After outlining the conversation Natalie and Marcia have, Smith writes, "everything was the same in the flat, yet there was a new feeling of lack. A new awareness. And lo they saw their nakedness and were ashamed. On the table Marcia laid out a fan of credit cards. As Marcia talked her daughter through the chaotic history of each card Natalie made notes as best she could." (295). Smith reactivates "consciousness," this time reconstructing it as "awareness," a word which adheres to only one of the two interpretations Smith suggests "consciousness" can mean: what Felix

calls, “getting it.” Smith eliminates the opportunity for Natalie to remain a passive accomplice in the political and social exploitation of minority communities by making the material conditions of that exploitation immediately, inescapably present to her.

In her visit to her mother’s home, Natalie inhabits the role of an external figure, a member of the neo-liberal Britain for whom marginalized groups perform a function – in this case, to separate her own living conditions from those existing in a lower class. Only by recognizing the lack in her family’s private context can Natalie assign a fullness to her own: one achieved through hard work and her own merit. Smith’s use of “shameful nakedness” registers in multiple ways, touching on myriad post-New Labour failures regarding minority communities. This nakedness refers, at once to: Natalie’s own embarrassment as she recognizes the means she comes from, her family’s embarrassment at their own dispossession in the face of Natalie’s success, and even the shameful nakedness of the post-New Labour ideology itself as having left behind the communities it claimed to empower.

Racial minorities are not the only communities caught in the fallout of the post-New Labour moment. Eastern European immigrants also faced forms of social exclusion because of what Huw Benyon and Lou Kushnick, in their article, “Cool Britannia or Cruel Britannia? Racism and New Labour” call “a move from biological to cultural racism” (236). This movement that Benyon and Kushnick describe re-start forms of political dispossession on a broader scale: a scale measured by economic status, disadvantaging immigrants from myriad backgrounds. Ambalavaner Sivanandan describes the phenomenon as “xeno-racism.” He defines the word as, “a xenophobia that bears all the marks of old racism, except that it is not color-coded. It is a racism [...]

directed [...] at the newer categories of displaced and dispossessed whites, who are beating at western Europe's doors. It is [...] a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white" (quoted from Benyon and Kushnick).

In her handling of xeno-racism in *NW*, Smith employs an implicit form of parallelism between xeno-racist and traditionally racist social scripts. Smith uses stock phrases with racial undertones and reductive rhetorical maneuvers, but she turns them on an Eastern European civil servant. By doing so, Smith lays bare how neo-liberalism, an ideology based on superficial and linguistic change, only works to recreate political de-subjectification within Britain's immigrant populations. Smith signs the beginning of an old cycle of discrimination and exclusion based on a system of empty, politically correct semiotics. The "correct" language expresses a form of cultural autonomy for a speaker, who then is able to speak about other communities with impunity. Just as minority figures in the café perform a function as representative social metonymy for "vibrant" communities, the use of "appropriate" language to describe subjugated communities is meant to sign the upward mobility of those communities without having to deal with their actual conditions.

While Felix is visiting with Annie – herself, "a relative of the *actual* landlord, as in the lord of the land" (166) and therefore connected to notions of traditional Britishness – a civil worker collecting property tax visits. On answering the door, the civil worker hands over his card. Annie then says to him, "Do you have instructions to come and harass me? Do you? I don't think you do, Mr.—I can't possibly pronounce that name—I don't think you do, Erik" (166). Annie's inability to, and then outright refusal to say Erik's last name empties Erik of a political subjectivity, reducing him to a first name,

while folding him into a tradition of foreigners denied political autonomy because of the obvious foreignness of their names. After speaking, Annie says to Erik, “what a funny accent you have. Is it Swedish?” (166) Erik corrects her and clarifies that he is Norwegian. While Annie’s hostility based on Erik’s ethnic background is clear, her use of “funny,” and her deployment of a question absolve her of appearing outright hostile towards Erik. She adheres to the rules of rhetorical acceptance, but exploits the obvious failures in meaningful acceptance neo-liberal multiculturalism promotes. As they continue to talk, Annie asks Erik, “is it Sweden that had all the recent trouble?” Erik replies, “excuse me?” to which Annie says, “I mean Norway. Oh you know, with the money [...]” (166). Erik clarifies once again, “you are speaking of Iceland, I think” (167). Annie replies, “Am I? Oh, perhaps I am. I always get the Nordic ones sort of...” (167). In a clear echo of the reductivist approaches to “black” immigrants from the mid to late twentieth century, Annie uses the term “Nordic” as a catchall phrase for what she sees as an interchangeable, homogenous group. Annie replicates social scripts that reduce non-Britons to only the fact of their foreignness. She uses her language to reinforce the boundary that differentiates interiority and exteriority, even in twenty-first century Britain.

Smith uses Annie to penetrate into the heart of how a semiotics of inclusion – the language of multiculturalism – is, on its own, insufficient and in fact damaging to communities it is meant to include. While defending Felix’s right as a visitor to her room, Annie forgoes the underlying irony that runs through her language in the previous portions of the discussion and says to Erik, “[h]is name’s Felix Cooper. He is a filmmaker. And he does *not* live here. He lives in North West London [...] you’d be

wrong to dismiss it actually because actually it's very interesting, very 'diverse.' Lord what a word" (168). Annie's last clause – her disapproval of the word "diverse" itself – reflects the emptiness of the rhetoric of inclusion that makes up the neo-liberal ideological landscape. The fact of "interest," an otherness that becomes papered over with the title "diverse," betrays the extant divisions and sustained exclusion and dispossession communities that make up "diverse" parts of London still live in.

In the face of New Labour's lip service to minority and politically desubjectivized communities, Smith explores a model of communal recuperation based in nostalgia. This nostalgia is a return to older spaces, outside of the bind of neo-liberalism: spaces that exist both physically, and aesthetically. Smith uses Leah and Natalie as the vehicles in her exploration of nostalgia as a means of subjective and communal recuperation. She uses the physical space of a church and its graveyard, and the aesthetic space of rap music as the means through which individuals facing exclusion and isolation (re)connect with forms of community to escape the post-New Labour social trap.

While proposing nostalgia as a possible alternative, Smith complicates how nostalgia allows Leah and Natalie to create spaces of individuation by showing it to be insufficient in creating a space that either character can fully inhabit. Leah pursues an unchanging, constant life despite pressures from her family – Leah's community – to progress. She discovers a model for this kind of unchanging temporal living at a church she and Natalie come across. While the kind of temporal living Leah pursues suspends a sociopolitical narrative of "progress," it simultaneously empties Leah of her individual subjecthood by enacting a form of self-erasure. Smith activates a narrative of self-erasure through ekphrasis, and through imagery in the graveyard and motifs Leah comes across at

the church. The mechanism of Leah's unchanging life: her abortion, becomes overlaid with the images Smith places in the graveyard scene, and reveals how Leah's attempts to stall time by inhabiting the space of the church will actually render her without any identity at all, creating an irresolvable tension between Leah's desire, and the expectations of her community on her. Michel and Pauline, Leah's mother, both pressure her to pursue a pregnancy, seeing a child as the next step in her life.

The church appears to be physical proof of an existence that evades time. One of the subplots in the first "Visitation" is Leah and Michel's ongoing argument about children: Michel wants a child, while Leah does not. After finally getting pregnant, Leah aborts the child in secret. In one of the sections that follow, Leah and Natalie walk through the town and come across a church, "in the middle of a roundabout. Out of time, out of place" (77). The element of time is central to Leah's navigation of her own life: she constantly looks for time to stop; the novel's first line reflects this desire for stasis, "[t]he fat sun stalls by the phone masts" (3). Leah discovers this temporal stasis in the churchyard. After walking onto the church property, Smith writes, "it is eleven thirty in the morning, in another century, another England" (77). The church exists in a frozen time that Leah desires herself to live in. Even the vicar exists atemporally: "[h]e as he would have been in 1920 or 1880 or 1660" (80), appearing as a constant entity regardless of what century he is in. Smith continues "[the vicar] is the same, but his congregation is different. Polish, Indian, African, Caribbean" (80). The nationalities represented reflect a mosaic of immigrant communities not broken up by ethnic, racial, or colonial histories, but rather allow the church to tie them together, reinforcing the church's place inside of a primordial, pre-temporal history.

While the church and vicar appear to preserve a Britain predating notions of race, it is not immune to the changes of the Britain within which it exists. At the same time, therefore, the church becomes the mechanism which reinforces the necessary temporal flux that makes up “history,” reminding Leah of her own, personal history. The images Leah comes across in the graveyard remind her of her procedure, and therefore call forward the cost of an unchanging existence: isolation and the loss of her own identity. After reading some of the epitaphs on tombstones, Leah leans against a stone on which Smith describes a scene of a female figure. Smith writes:

Here are three figures in haut relief, almost entirely effaced. She fits her fingers into the mossy grooves. A lady in gathered skirts in clutching something to her body, a featureless lump, something she has been given, maybe, and two young boys in frock coats reach out for her on either side. She is no one. Time has eaten away all detail: no name no date no face no knees no explanation of the mysterious gift (79).

Smith use of ekphrasis recreates Leah’s abortion through the figures in haut relief, while also capturing the burden she inescapably bears to a model of community based on familial generation. In the description of the haut relief, the lady is described as “no one.” The erasure of the lady’s identity is the result of the passage of “Time,” which has “eaten away all detail.” In this moment, Smith enacts what it would mean for Leah to exist within a temporality similar to that of the Church: untouched by the greater progression of time, but herself, unable to escape her own history, and therefore faded into nothingness because her resistance to change erases a future generation, which in turn erases every generation past. In truth, what Leah is resisting is the Heideggerean notion

of time. She is struggling with the quality of being dependent on being thrown into Time, without which the quality of being disappears. Her struggle against Time mirrors her struggle against her community's desire for preservation through procreation.

For Leah, existing within Time, and therefore as a true being means adhering to the communal understanding of what moving forward looks like: motherhood. Smith refracts Leah's choice further through the figures in haut relief. The "featureless lump" that the figure is holding represents Leah's unborn child, while the two boys reaching out for her as though to receive the lump are the men in Leah's life for whom procreation is a form of survival: Michel, and her father Colin Hanwell. Colin Hanwell appears just before his rendering in stone in an epitaph Leah imagines about herself. The epitaph doubles as a poem, which reads, "Take it easy of forty-eight hours. / In this terrible sun. / Take it easy, Leah Hanwell of this parish. Only daughter of Colin Hanwell, also of this parish. / Take it easy for the rest of your life" (79). The imagined epitaph overlays Leah's abortion, through the insistence to "take it easy" – simulating the language after a procedure – and the fact that as Colin Hanwell's only daughter, if she were to "take it easy for the rest of [her] life," Colin Hanwell would be truly dead. By further linking Leah and Colin through their shared belonging to the parish, the space of the church becomes a re-inscription of the changes in her life Leah is expected to make: namely, having a child.

While Leah espouses a reflexively damaging form of nostalgia to express an identity within the confines of a community, Natalie embraces a form of nostalgia based in rap music from the 1990s. Natalie's reliance on rap music, however, is equally as flawed as Leah's desire for stillness. Smith makes a number of allusions of rap artists in

moments of the text when Natalie feels some kind of isolation. To Natalie, music becomes a kind of *objet petit a*, where listening to it opens up an aesthetic community that allows Natalie a space of her own where she is interior. This, however, creates a paradox within Natalie's self-determined identity. In her mind, Natalie's social mobility and her move out of NW is based on her own merit and the work she put in at school and at her job. She differentiates herself from individuals from the NW still trapped in their social circumstances. Those same characters, however, consume rap music based in the same locality and temporal moment as the artists Natalie uses to reinforce her subjecthood. Natalie's rejection and at the same time her reliance on the rap community finds a fundamental paradox within her, a paradox she expresses through the irreconcilable identities of Keisha and Natalie.

Smith makes recurring references to rap and hip hop artists when Natalie feels isolated from the community of people around her. The first time Natalie turns to rap, she is disengaging from her first boyfriend, Rodney Banks, and is out with Leah. At the bar they are at, Leah leaves Natalie to talk to a Korean girl, Alice (244-245). While watching Leah hit on Alice, "as old-school lothario," Natalie sees Leah's interaction with another girl as "natural" (245). Smith then writes, "[t]his thought made Natalie wonder at herself and where she was with God these days, or if she was with him at all. Unable to stop staring she made herself walk over to the jukebox and put on the song "Electric Relaxation" by A Tribe Called Quest in the hope that it would relax her" (245). Natalie reflects on her greater community: her church, and seeing herself as without, she turns to music to reinforce a sense of belonging through a community of rap consumers.

As Smith's narrative continues, her allusions to rap music appear in contexts closer to Natalie's individuality. Where she first turns to A Tribe Called Quest in thinking about her place in her religious community, hip hop appears again later when Natalie's feels exterior to a community of mothers, pushing her into the periphery of a maternal, generative community. During a lunch she has with an old acquaintance of hers from NW, Layla, Natalie decries a mother-child bonding class she attends. Natalie says, "I just sat in a circle of these freaks and thought: I really don't belong here. Show me the exit. I need people I can go out dancing with" (332). Layla agrees to go out with Natalie, who then replies, "[t]hank you! There's an old school hip-hop night in Farringdon somewhere, my brother told me about it" (332). Natalie refers to the group as "freaks" establishing them as exterior to a model of normalcy she understands characterized by people willing to attend an event celebrating "old school hip hop." Eventually however, Layla positions herself outside of Natalie's conception of "normal" by admitting, "I like those kid classes. I used to go all the time" (332). The history Layla and Natalie share: their common socio-racial background, their previous friendship, their experiences as mothers, becomes insufficient in developing a communal relationship between the two.

As the text continues, Smith uses the malleable form of her text to represent Natalie's isolation from her family, but also signs a distance from, and division within herself. In section 171. *Me, myself and I*, Smith writes, "Natalie put Naomi in her car-seat and locked the buckle. Natalie put Spike in his car-seat and locked the buckle. Natalie climbed up into the giant car. Natalie closed all the windows. Natalie put on the air conditioning. Natalie put *Reasonable Doubt* in the stereo. Natalie instructed Frank to mute egregious profanity as and when it arrived" (333). Smith begins every sentence with

“Natalie,” isolating her within the family structure. When paired with the title and its focus on both interiority and also the split of Natalie’s interiority as each of object, and subject, it becomes apparent that Smith uses semantic saturation to void “Natalie” of meaning. Smith uses further repetition to create an almost automatic quality to Natalie. Smith’s use of semantic saturation mirrors the dissociation of Natalie’s interiority. Every sentence not only begins with “Natalie,” but the name is followed every time by a verb in the simple past: four of which are the same verb “put,” reinforcing the mechanized effect of the passage. Natalie’s turn to Jay Z’s first album signals the increasing isolation from the community closest to her: her family, and at the same time, the discontinuity with herself. She continues to use her consumption of music to attempt to recuperate a form of community and identity within herself: to recall a residue of her upbringing in NW, when she was only names Keisha.

Whereas the Smith’s invocation of rap and hip hop appear primarily in “Host,” her final use of rap music appears in “Crossing,” when Natalie and Nathan walk from, as the section title suggests, “Hampstead to Archway” (374). This final reference, a direct citation of a Nas-Lauryn Hill collaboration – and the only directly cited lyrics in the novel – reveals the problems of an exclusionary community based on artistic consumption, and lays bare the internal paradox that Natalie builds her subjectivity around. This paradox is the internalized belief that Natalie has that she exists in a community of rap listeners, akin to her former NW community, but at the same time, has moved into a hegemonic community of social and political possession. It is not Natalie, but rather from Nathan who sings the chorus from “If I Ruled the World,” positioning him within the community of rap listeners that Natalie relies on to exclude others. At the

same time, however, Natalie considers Nathan an inferior, less deserving member of society than herself. At the end of the book, while speaking with Leah about their material conditions, Natalie says, “we worked harder [...]. We were smarter and we knew we didn’t want to end up begging on other people’s doorsteps. We wanted to get out. People like Bogle — they didn’t want it enough. I’m sorry if you find that answer ugly, Lee, but it’s the truth” (400). Natalie continues to use a language of reflexive exclusion. The desire to “get out”- to escape the conditions of NW, to leave behind a compromised socioeconomic situation, to experience the social mobility promised by New Labour – become the conditions of inclusion in Natalie’s community of exiles. Where before, rap music was the thing that oriented Natalie’s marginalized identity, the openness of an aesthetic community – like the hip hop community – is actually the drive that carries Natalie/Keisha out of NW, and into a liminal space without from every community.

What Smith’s project reveals in showing the failures of prior forms of community, along with the trap of Post-New Labour neoliberalism, is not only the failure of representation of marginalized communities, but the failure of the idea of community itself. Without providing the necessary social infrastructure to marginalized communities, the state recreates old forms of geographic and political segregation, but through the sheen of inclusivity. The failures of those communities thus becomes almost an inevitability against the expectation of social mobility without the opportunity for it signaling their own failure, and the failure of the British state – the British community – at large. Smith locates this failure of community in her text by cultivating a textual interest in gaps and spaces. These gaps appear temporally, spatially, and most importantly, they appear linguistically and formally. The gaps in Smith’s writing move

away from the semiotic formula New Labour embraced, and turns towards a Derridean formulation that allows greater interplay between signifier and signified. She exploits and revels in the semiotic gap, eventually working the novel into a knot that, through a reexamination of her own title, places her work, and her own place as a major voice in the representation of “multiculturalism” under stress. The gaps Smith includes in her writing sign forms of violence against communities, violences which are reinforced and recreated through literary and aesthetic representations.

Imagery dealing with gaps and chasms recur throughout the novel. Particularly interesting in my exploration of community and individuals are the recurring inter and intra-personal gaps that manifest both physically, and in characters’ relationships. Gaps signal the openness to multiplicity, and the embrace of definitional complexity within communities, individuals, and language alike. At the same time, however, gaps reflect a violence enacted upon those same communities, individuals, and language through their representation. In her book *Voices of Negritude in Modernist Print: Aesthetic Subjectivity, Diaspora, and the Lyric Regime*, Carrie Noland makes a similar connection between language and wounding in Black European writing. Noland writes, “[l]ike the remainders of only half-understood African languages, half heard rhythms, and half-remembered belief systems with which slave-descendants must make a life, these words constitute the holy wound, the ‘blessure sacrée,’ that hurts but preserves” (211). Noland continues, “[t]he speaker is attempting to inhabit a space that is both there and not there (entre bulbe et caïeu), just as one might entertain a memory that recalls only that the memory has been lost” (211). While Noland is writing about the poetry of Aimé Césaire, her categorization of ambivalent language – at once recuperative, but also harmful – is a

useful model with which to understand Smith's approach to how she represents marginalized communities and individuals. Just as the words Noland refers to are at once "preserving," they are also a reminder of the failings of words – a reminder of the gap in representation.

Smith works to unveil the links between language and the body, which suggest that the violence of language is a violence against the body. She writes, "[p]eople were not people but merely an effect of language. You could conjure them up and kill them in a sentence" (295). Smith activates this link between people and the language that represents them in her handling of Felix's murder. At the end of "Guest," after a brief altercation on a bus with two black youths, Felix runs into them again, where they proceed to rob him. After handing over his phone and the little cash he has, Smith writes, "'And the stones,' said the kid. Felix touched his ears. Treasured zirconias, a present from Grace." Felix's refusal to hand over the studs he received from his girlfriend are the catalyst for his murder. The zirconia ear studs perform a function for Felix beneath being sentimental reminders of his girlfriend: they are the symbol of his embrace of the neo-liberal attempts to reduce the multiplicity – to cover over the gaps – in marginalized communities, and therefore of the individuals within those communities. In addition to literally closing over gaps in Felix's ears, the zirconias are a constant reminder of Grace, who encourages Felix to find means to cover over the gaps and complexities in his own life. This reduction is characterized by Grace's handling of Felix's brother, Devon. After Annie asks after Devon, Smith writes, "[i]n Grace's company Devon was rarely mentioned. He was one of the 'negative sources of energy' they were meant to be cleansing from their lives. (178). By "rarely mentioning" Devon – the underside and

partial reality of marginalized communities – Felix and Grace resist representing him, and thus resist Noland’s “blessure sacrée,” leaving Devon and his situation unpreserved.

Felix’s commitment to Grace and her neo-liberalism resolves in his own murder over zirconia studs she gifts him and manifests the inherent violence of linguistic representation and recreation. In narrating Felix murder, Smith removes human agents from the scene, shifting the narrative voice into one preoccupied by language, and through language, murders Felix. In doing so, Smith reveals the limits of language to represent and recreate violence by imprinting on Felix a permanent gap that is in truth, the gap of language. After refusing to hand over his zirconia, Felix turns away from the muggers. Smith narrates,

A breeze passed over the three of them, filling their hoods and sending a cloud of sycamore leaves spinning to the pavement. A firm punch came to his side. Punch? The pain sliced to the left, deep and down. Warm liquid reversed up his throat. Yet it couldn’t be oblivion as long as he could name it, and with this in mind he said aloud what had been done to him, what was being done to him, he tried to say it, he said nothing. Grace!(198).

Smith voids the passage of actors, rendering the actual stabbing into just “the pain.” She chooses instead to dive into Felix’s interiority as he processes the stabbing. By doing so, Smith dissolves the entire scene into language and lays bare the shortcomings of linguistic representation. Not only does the narration question reflexively “Punch?” Smith uses a temporal shift, moving from “what had been done” to “what was being done” in reference to both the stabbing, and also his actual rendering into a sentence. Smith uses the “nothing” that punctuates Felix’s attempts to speak as a way to mirror the

end his life with the end of the sentence. Instead of speaking, Felix spits up “warm liquid.” Felix’s expulsion of his bodily interior – represented in aporia as blood, or possibly the sentence’s ink – is a manifestation of the inescapable violence of language that is, in turn, unable to escape the gap in meaning, rendered through his stabbing. The gap that Grace, and the post-New Labour ideology, attempt to cover over becomes impossible to dismiss because of Smith’s representation of that gap in language imprinted onto Felix’s body.

Smith, aware of the violence of *NW*, consciously draws the reader’s attention to the gaps in her own form, mediating the fragments of her text as image fragments. By doing so, Smith acknowledges the failure of her own project to represent the communities within the lived *NW*. She uses her own failure, however as a means through which to reflect the impossibility of representing any community through text, and in doing so, places stress on her own career, and her position as a “multicultural” author. Marica, Natalie’s mother, refers to aesthetic form while watching a television show about poverty. Marica says, “I hate the way the camera jumps all over the place like that [...] you can’t forget about the filming for a minute. Why do they always do that these days?” (317). The television show becomes a stand-in for Smith’s novel: a representation of a poor community whose form refuses to allow the consumer to forget the constructedness of the community being consumed. Marica’s use of a temporal moment: “these days,” reverberates within the text, but also within the cultural moment Smith writes in herself. Smith is signing the artifice of *every* represented community: be they by the public presence of minority individuals representing their communities – what I had earlier

referred to as social semiotics – or the representation of marginalized communities in literature.

To Smith, the act of creation is insufficient. When Natalie becomes pregnant, Smith re-introduces “the broken image” motif to locate the bind that “multicultural” writers fall into, while resisting to offer a solution. Smith writes:

Pregnancy brought Natalie only more broken images from the great mass of cultural detritus she took in every day on a number of different devices, some handheld, some not. To behave in accordance with these images bored her. To deviate from them filled her with the old anxiety. She grew anxious that she was not anxious about the things you were meant to be anxious about (323)

Smith plays out the demands the literary marketplace places on “multicultural” authors. Earlier in the text, Natalie says to herself, “I am the sole author” (251): a refrain which recurs throughout the novel, first appearing in the first chapter in the first “Visitation.” Thus, as “the sole author,” the progenitor of the representation of people, the language around Natalie’s pregnancy resonates in the context of the literary marketplace. The market expects “multicultural authors” to represent communities according to certain generic conventions, and through particular rhetorical maneuvers: something Smith accomplished in her widely acclaimed *White Teeth*. By the time of *NW*, however, this representation becomes “cultural detritus.” “Deviation” from the market’s expectations, however jeopardizes the place of multicultural representation in the literary marketplace entirely, threatening a return to prior, even more exclusionary forms of literature: “the old anxiety.”

Smith constructs this representational knot, and finally, when Natalie gives birth, she cements the insufficiency – and thus the violence – of representation. Smith then uses this insufficiency and violence to make an argument for the potential for progress. After Natalie gives birth, Smith writes, “the brutal awareness of the real that she had so hoped for and desired – that she hadn’t even realized she was counting on – failed to arrive” (323). “The real” that never arrives is the fact of the gap within language, and within literature. Smith’s word “awareness” recurs here, opening up the dialectic of failure her project embraces. What *NW* offers is, on one hand, a scathing indictment of forms of representation of marginalized communities, and the role that representation plays in reinforcing that same marginalization. On the other hand, Smith suggests that the failure of literature is a form of “awareness”- the same quality of social and political engagement that Felix references that signs for the reader the futility of language to refabricate the people and communities. Indeed the awareness Smith affords her readers is the awareness that she and her text are engaged in the same forms of aesthetic contradiction and exploitation that manifest from New Labour’s social semiotics. She challenges the complacency of superficial representation and recreation as “progress,” instead using the shortcoming of literary creation as a means of drawing readers’ attentions to the emptiness of rhetorical and representational progress without true, material change.

Zadie Smith’s *NW* is an exercise in the failure of recreation. Smith even modifies the novel’s title to capture the failure, not only of the representations of communities, but also the displacement of the idea of “community.” In a cultural moment, where forms of exclusion remain, but the mechanisms of exclusion are shifting from racism to xenoracism, Smith recognizes the shortcomings of only aesthetic representation as a form of

cultural and political recuperation. Smith fills *NW* with characters becoming more and more isolated, suffering within the gaps in their subject-hood, seemingly unable to find empathy in their semiotic communities. Rather, what Smith motions towards is the potential for rewriting communal lines that reach out from the individual's interiority: a community that exists within the gap.

Smith recognizes the need for a poststructuralist understanding of social semiotics to reconstruct notions of community. In her article "The Right to a Secret: Zadie Smith's *NW*," Lynn Wells explores the centrality of Derrida's understanding of "secrets" and the role they play in creating "belonging"- the same word Arana uses in describing Smith's *White Teeth*. Wells explains, "[i]n Derrida's sense of the word here, 'belonging' entails a capitulation of the self to collective definition, a state of being 'put in common' with other of the same clan or race or nationality or gender, ironically among the major coordinates of much identity politics with its essentialist tendencies" (99). A close reading of *NW*, however, reveals that the coordinates of identity politics are insufficient in creating "belonging." What is necessary, is a community based on empathy: a community of belonging based on the seeming inability to belong. In "Host," Smith returns to Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger, the latter's place being of particular interest to my exploration of the individual in the novel. Smith constructs Keisha as a Heideggerean being: a *Dasein*, beginning in *9. Thrown*. Smith, in describing a young Keisha writes, "[i]n the child's mind a breach now appeared: between what she believed she knew of herself, *essentially*, and her essence as other seemed to understand it" (208 Smith's emphasis). Smith invokes Heidegger to recreate the semiotic gap – "the breach" inside Keisha, as a central construction of identity. The community Smith is unable to

explore is one based on covalent experiences among *Daseins*: a community of people experiencing forms of internal fracture. Until then, however, *NW* will continue to mean North West, but also, as Natalie replies to Frank when he asks her, “where the fuck she thought she was going:” “Nowhere” (355).

In *NW*, Smith recognizes the position of marginalized groups in contemporary Britain. What she pushes for, however, is a recognition of those groups as discrete individuals rather than simply as political tools. In her conclusion to *Chimeras of Form*, Vadde writes about chimeric forms’ as being “propaedeutic” (230). She writes, “they offer readers preliminary instruction in discerning power dynamics, social struggles, and intellectual impasses of modernity as a globalizing force” (230). The focus of propaedeutic writing is not strictly didactic, but rather encourages further exploration of seemingly crystallized forms of knowledge. She continues, “[chimeric aesthetic projects] show us how state and cultural violence are implicit in establishes ways of thinking about collective membership as bounded and territorialized, and they devise new metaphors, images, words, and categories for rethinking belonging and political obligation with feeling and force” (231). Vadde names the same semiotic reliance of “established ways of thinking about collective membership” that Smith challenges in *NW*. Further, Vadde’s “rethinking of belonging,” for Smith, is a turn to continental philosophy.

Smith’s dialogue with Heideggerean conceptions of “being” is a maneuver that allows marginalized individuals the opportunity to be more than just marginalized: more than arguing for a broadening of what count as political subjects, Smith reminds readers that there exist human subjects. Given that these human subjects exist beyond notions of race, class, or community, she addresses a gap in how community is created, and begins a

conversation to discover new ways of constructing forms of belonging. Smith's *NW* remains a reminder of the failure of community as we currently understand it: superordinating the individual identity to the markers of identity. That being said, Smith encourages the imagination for new forms of community within the dialectic of being and belonging.

Conclusion

John McLeod writes, “‘postcolonial London’ does not factually denote a given place or mark a stable location on a map. It emerges at the intersection of the concrete and the noumenal, between the material conditions of metropolitan life and the imaginative representations made of it” (7). It is this liminality that I have tried to explore through my study of the formal qualities of how London appears in contemporary British novels. My exploration of interiority and exteriority and of communal possession and dispossession takes on a new, fascinating dimension when cast against the backdrop of the current British political climate. In 2016, the Janus face of Britain/England reared once again. On one face, London elected Mayor Sadiq Khan: its first Muslim mayor. On the other, xeno-racist arguments about cultural preservation underpinned the decision Britain arrived at to withdraw from the European Union.

The two campaigns followed counter-parallel paths when dealing with notions of race and British identity and re-created discourses of inclusion and exclusion within the British polity. As Andrew Glencross writes in his book *Why the UK voted for Brexit*, “the strong preference of Londoners to stay in the EU contrasts with the core Northern English and Welsh vote to leave, mirroring the structural divide between cosmopolitan, metropolitan liberals and globalization’s left-behinds in the provinces” (4). At the same time however, “globalization’s left-behinds” – the communities in the periphery of the new, cosmopolitan world, triumphed in the referendum. The leader of the “Brexit” campaign, Nigel Farage said that the decision to leave was a victory, “for the real people, the ordinary people, the decent people” (5). The position, therefore of being “left-

behind,” but at the same time, “real” and “ordinary,” re-exerts the complex, Gordian relationship between British centrality and marginality.

While the Brexit campaign’s racial aspect reflected the charge of British xenoracism against white Eastern Europeans, the mayoral election appeared to overcome the challenges of “traditional” racism typically targeted against ethnic minorities. An article published by British newspaper, *The Guardian*, titled, “Top Conservatives condemn Zac Goldsmith’s ‘disgusting’ mayoral campaign” outlines the criticism Goldsmith received for what the Labour party called “dog-whistle racist” comments he made to Khan during the London mayoral election. Yet, the article concedes, “[m]any Conservatives kept quiet about their concerns until after the polls closed but, as it became clear Khan was going to win by a landslide, a string of senior figures spoke out.” The overt political impulse of the conservative condemnation of Goldsmith’s remarks is cause for concern, and reveal the lingering neoliberal impulse for representation over restructuring. Why the need to wait for a “landslide” before condemning essentialist, reductivist, dangerous rhetoric within the public sphere?

What I hope my reading of British novels from the preceding 40 years has offered is a way to understand the contradictions and tensions that remain within vexing, unsettled, and still unresolved meanings of Britishness and the politics of community. A critical study of literary texts reveals the means through which social codes rely on, and crystallize flawed notions of identity that result in imaginary and material violences, not only against centered and marginalized communities alike, but also against the integrity of a British identity entirely. What I hope this thesis has afforded is the beginning of a discussion of how the urban space of London affords readers a critical understanding of

the liminality of borders and the means through which an aesthetic response to oppression is always insufficient, but also always necessary.

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