

**Between the black Atlantic and Europe: Emerging paradigms in  
contemporary black British writing**

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## Abstract

My thesis explores the emerging concerns of contemporary black British writing. I index the move towards a non-normative black British aesthetic through my reading of the twenty-first century novels of Diana Evans, Bernardine Evaristo, Caryl Phillips and Zadie Smith.

I hypothesise that the works interrogated in the thesis offer a break from the generational model of black British writing, and in so doing shift the trajectories of black British writing away from the triangulated model of Paul Gilroy's 'black Atlantic'. I argue that the novels posit a non-normative black British aesthetic which draws upon multidirectional cultural trajectories. Locating this non-normative aesthetic in relation to iterations of Englishness allow my readings of the novels to uncover a newly emergent writing of black British selfhood which engages with transcultural and non-diasporic modes of cosmopolitan belonging. I identify a positioning of Europe as an *alternative dwelling place* which allows for new trajectories of travel for the black British subject.

Subsequently, this thesis interrogates the implications for collective cultural histories, narrative and memory in which critical theories of cosmopolitanism and multidirectional memory intervene. I hypothesise a transformative energy within contemporary black British fiction as it moves on from the language of identity, crosses the boundaries of nationhood and memory, and offers a new vocabulary for the articulation of cultural belonging and 'Englishness'.

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## Introduction

### Exploring the twenty-first century trajectories of black British writing

‘in the silence of the sky I longed for an image,  
a story, to speak to me, describe me, birth me whole.  
Living in my skin, I was, but which one?’

(*Lara* 1997 69)

In 2009, black British poet and author Bernardine Evaristo published a revised and expanded second edition of her 1997 semi-autobiographical novel-in-verse, *Lara*. *Lara* tells the story of the eponymous protagonist’s childhood in London suburbia, and interweaves her experiences of growing up in 1970s London with the diasporic histories of her Anglo-Irish-Nigerian parents and ancestors. In the original 1997 edition, the novel-in-verse focuses heavily on Lara’s paternal ancestry, that of the black Atlantic diaspora. The narrative traces the history of the da Costa family, beginning with the death of Lara’s great-great grandmother Tolulope at the hands of a sexually sadistic slave master in Brazil, and ending with Lara and her parents visiting Nigeria, and later Brazil, together in her adulthood and returning to a Britain with ‘the “Great” Tippexed out of it’ (1997 140). Although a few brief lines in the first edition are devoted to the story of Lara’s maternal Irish heritage, the focus is on the journey of this mixed-race child to connect with her blackness, hunting for the stories that her father Taiwo deliberately withholds from his daughters. The first edition of the text has previously been read as exploring the cultural legacies of empire, in which ‘[i]nside the nation’s forgetfulness about empire, the memory-traces [of racial tension] remained’ (Schwarz 15). However, despite the ability to read the text as ‘exploring the global connections established during empire’ (Mycock 19), with the revised edition Evaristo’s narrative contributes to a new articulation of English writing which

grapples with the received characteristics of the post-empire English novel, and in doing so builds a new framework with which to interrogate contemporary articulations of Englishness.

In contrast to the originally published text, the revised edition of *Lara* (2009) devoted a substantial portion of the narrative to tracing the protagonist's Anglo-Irish-German ancestry back through the generations of her maternal line. In linking Lara's genealogical search to all of the varied trajectories of her heritage, Evaristo repositions her as located at the centre of interweaving, polycultural migrant histories. The new focus of the text is signalled by the cover artwork, which no longer depicts an African tribal mask, but features instead the wedding photo of Evaristo's own parents. This new image reinforces both the multiplicity of cultures to be unearthed, and also the personal nature of the events of the text. In addition to expanding the Irish strain of the narrative, with the new edition Evaristo details the previously glossed-over German heritage of Lara's maternal grandfather, Leslie. Formerly dismissed as a 'subaltern on parade' by his Anglo-Irish wife (1997 15), (in reference to his family's German migrant background), Leslie articulates a new telling of migrant experience in the expanded edition. In voicing the story of Leslie's grandfather Louis, a German migrant socially and economically excluded during the First World War, Evaristo exposes the dynamic diasporic European roots of those who consider themselves resolutely "English". The expansion of Leslie's ancestral story also explained his pragmatic acceptance of her mother's mixed-race relationship in the original edition, as 'Mother/ is half-German, Peggy herself is half-Irish/ So when Ellen brought this coloured chap home/ how could I object?' (2009 81). With this, Evaristo allows for an embedded sense of multiple locations, radiating not just from the black diaspora, but also across various European migratory trajectories. In turn, three other black British authors – Diana Evans, Caryl Phillips and Zadie Smith – map the alternative

trajectories with which my work is concerned. I will argue in this thesis that these four authors anticipate a cosmopolitanism that includes both a critique of multiculturalism and an attempt at multidirectional memory, and which is less interested in a 'claim' to the black diaspora around which much critical theory is still focussed.

In my investigation of Evaristo and her contemporaries Diana Evans, Caryl Phillips and Zadie Smith, I will ask how their work over the past decade intervenes in the existing paradigms of black British critical theory and reckons with emerging models of the so-called 'black British canon' moving forward. I do so with sensitivity to the on-going critical debate over the placement of black British writing within the canon. In their edited collection *A Black British Canon?* (2006), Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies argue 'that contestations over the meaning of the terms, "British" and "black British" should not be swept aside, since they foreground the ideological and discursive imprint of key political signs' ('Introduction' 5). My thesis takes as its starting point the contention that placing black British texts within a narrowly racial or national framework can obscure the ways in which they postulate new trajectories of travel. Locating the work of the black British authors included in this study within such narrow frameworks also fails to address the contra-influences of their multi-heritage backgrounds. Taking this argument a step further, maintaining a focus on the paradigmatics of race constrains our ways of reading and understanding British literature as a whole. I argue that, as well as being transnational, the writing of these authors also looks towards a (problematic and incomplete) post-racial future in which they traverse in new ways both European and African narrative trajectories. The authors included here follow the accepted trope of 'daily negotiation [of] crossing boundaries and barriers, [and] expanding limits' (M. Phillips 'Migration, Modernity and English Writing' 27), but they do so in increasingly non-normative ways.



In beginning to think about the aesthetics of black British writing and how this relates to the formation of the canon, we must first trace the critical engagement with black British aesthetics. Stuart Hall, writing in 1999, argues that constructions of British heritage must ‘include the active production of culture and the arts as a living activity’ (‘Whose Heritage?’ 4), and so must also include the aesthetics of black British cultural production. Hall points out that in order to engender a sense of belonging for all citizens, the multicultural society must be a place where all members see themselves reflected. However, his view of heritage-building and aesthetics in the ‘post-nation’ has not yet resulted in the active integration of black Britishness into the ‘lived daily reality’ of multicultural Britain (‘Whose Heritage?’ 3). Hall identifies the potential of black British aesthetics to facilitate ‘one of the most important cultural developments of our time . . . the local-in-the-global, the pioneering of a new cosmopolitan, vernacular, post-national, global sensibility’ (‘Whose Heritage?’ 13). This *potential* of black British writing to posit cosmopolitan communities which allow for a post-racial rendering of the national is one which we will explore in more detail later in the introduction. For now, what’s fascinating to note is that the interest of the local-global has been articulated in these texts as specifically English, rather than British. James Procter warns against the ‘repeated slippage . . . between “English” and “British”’ when discussing black British texts, arguing that ‘the need to account for such slippages becomes increasingly important’ in a post-devolution context (Procter 2). Indeed, it is difficult, when discussing the particularity of England within these writer’s works, to avoid such slippage. The distinction I will attempt to draw within my own work will be between the black British canon and the specificity of English locales within the narratives themselves.

Hall’s work quoted above grapples with the limitations of multicultural policy, and argues for a transcultural identity which transcends the national. In her

introduction to a recent edited collection on black British aesthetics, R. Victoria Arana defines aesthetics as ‘the deliberate design of the appeal to an audience’ (‘Preface’ iix), and argues that any discussion of black British literature cannot ‘ignore the artist’s local . . . situation, nor can it ignore the artist’s perception of himself within his or her cultural context’ (‘Aesthetics as Deliberate Design’ 1). While I disagree with Arana that contemporary criticism of black British writing has tended to ignore the form and design of the prose, her work is useful in gauging the critical response to black British writing in a globalised context. However, Arana contradicts her own argument when she first advocates a turn away from the social and demographic readings of black British literature to focus on its merits as art, and then states that no discussion of aesthetics can be complete without a consideration of the context under which the author operates. It is exactly the complexity of the interaction between artistic and social contexts which so perplexes the discussion of a particularly “black British aesthetic”. Here the limitations placed on Hall’s heritage-building become a part of the intrinsic design of the aesthetics of black British literature and art. Katharine Burkitt, in her discussion of Evaristo’s 2005 novel *Soul Tourists*, remarks that

the history of black people in the UK is a recurrent theme in Evaristo’s work and is often explicitly linked to her experimentations with form. For example . . . the second-generation Jamaican Stanley can only come to terms with his sense of Britishness by understanding the history of black people in Europe . . . these ghostly intermissions are marked by formal shifts from prose to poetry as Stanley is forced to recognise his own cultural heritage.

(Burkitt 70)

In her use of poetry and prose to signpost the juxtaposition of the contemporary with the historical, the 'real' with the 'imaginary', Evaristo's text realises the potential of literature to "fill in the gaps". Her diasporic imagining, refigured eastwards across Europe rather than west to the Atlantic, transmutes national and cultural boundaries and problematises the racialised conception of European/white, non-European/black. That this conceptual rendering of a transnational European belonging is bound up in the very aesthetics of the piece points to the transformative potential of black British writing's design.

In investigating the genealogy of black British writing, one must be sensitive to the ambiguities and limitations of trying to place these writers within a normative postcolonial frame. The attempt to locate black British writing within postcolonialism runs into difficulty once we acknowledge that black British experiences of hybridity and otherness are not the same as that of the migrant placed in a position of tension with the imperial centre. Conventional postcolonial theories of diaspora and migration prioritise an imperialist mapping of the world within which black British writing intervenes. Whilst highlighting the problematical positioning of black Britishness within tropes of postcolonialism, critics sometimes struggle to imagine a new framework within which to place black British writing. Invoking Homi Bhabha's theories of migrant cultural hybridities in relation to black British writing highlights that his theory of the hybrid works in part by its fixation on the postcolonial migrant. This privileging of the migrant figure is problematised by the mixed-race and British-born black experience. For Bhabha, the "newness" he identifies in postcolonial writing is created by the very survival of the migrant figure, whose narratives depict 'double-lives [that] are led in the postcolonial world, with its journeys of migration and its dwellings in the diasporic' (213). Yet the works I include in this study are not chronicles of survival, nor journeys of migration in the normative postcolonial sense.

As James Procter argues, ‘to be part of a diaspora community you do not have to have travelled somewhere . . . the national landscape of Britain is more than simply a nodal location within a global matrix of travel; it is also a dwelling place that has been home to a “sedentary” black experience’ (Procter 14-15, emphasis in orig.). Novels such as Zadie Smith’s *NW* (2012) are located within an English setting that, although peopled by the diaspora, is also localised and provincial. The novel speaks to the experience of one particular microcosm of London, not its whole, and as such the “globalised” in-between spaces of diasporic writing are inverted. The texts I will consider explore the position of black British writers as no longer interstitial or marginal – no longer a threat to national culture but engaged in attempts to re-inscribe it from a position of nativity. Bhabha’s ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’, which locates home in the interstices of ‘hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language’ (xiii), whilst expressing a link between black Britishness and the postcolonial, does not necessarily account for the particular stresses felt by black British writers in conveying their experiences in a non-discrete, often cosmopolitan manner.<sup>1</sup> It is in this way that normative notions of the postcolonial are problematised and may be shown to provide an inadequate framework for the critical debate on black Britishness.

Investigating new ways in which to interpret black British writing, John McLeod has noted that ‘[i]n contemporary black writing of Britain there is emerging a new envisioning of the nation prompted, but not pre-occupied, by racial and cultural specifics, in which . . . the notion of mixed-race plays a significant guiding role’

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<sup>1</sup> A. Sivanandan has written extensively on race and class issues in British society. In *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (1982), he argues that the ghettoization of post-War migrants in the inner cities of post-war Britain, combined with a second generation who had not ‘been found a place within the system’ (121) led to the Race Relations Act of 1976, ‘aimed at dismantling institutional racism while still allowing racialism to divide the working class’ (138).

(‘Extra Dimensions’ 48). As McLeod considers, the models which have been used to frame black British writing in the past are based on the “post-war migrant” or “second generation” identity politics of racialised intervention. These must be re-evaluated to understand the new genealogy of black Britishness, as a new sensibility comes to the fore in the writing of authors such as Smith, Evans, and Evaristo – all of whom are British-born, mixed-race women writers. These authors, too, have all been lauded as “the new voice of multicultural Britain” at one time or another in their careers, yet their writing articulates a multidirectional confluence of minority communities which I contend does not permit the cellular notion of multiculturalism, in which each community, whilst conversing, remains discrete and bound in its own notion of identity. Diana Evans has stated that, in writing her first novel *26a*, she ‘want[ed] to write about human experiences and *universal experiences* rather than write about what it means to be black or mixed race’ (Evaristo ‘Diana Evans in Conversation’ 33, emphasis added). Evans links this view with her own experience of growing up in inner-city London, going to school with children of all different races and backgrounds, which led to her rejection of a racially-specific outlook. This foregrounding of the potential for universalism pushes against a silo’d expectation of the themes available to black British authors.<sup>2</sup> Evans’s explicit engagement with the limitations of the ‘black British’ label shifts the boundaries imposed on her writing. In the contemporary black British writing I engage with, individuals converse and interact transculturally, rejecting assimilation yet allowing these ‘universal experiences’ to be shared equally across all groups. If communities are not bound up

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<sup>2</sup> The black British novelists Ben Okri and Courttia Newland have both recently published opinion pieces in the *Guardian* and *London Evening Standard* newspapers, respectively, that discuss their own experiences of the reductive parameters imposed on black British writing by both publishing houses and general readers.

in specificities of race and culture, then the normative idea of liberal multiculturalism is not useful as an adequate terminology with which to configure them. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, in a report for the Foreign Policy Centre in 2000, went so far as to say that ‘multiculturalism is getting in the way of our doing what we need to together – because it speaks not to our shared future, but much more to our past’ (*After Multiculturalism* 11). Multiculturalism can therefore be seen as limiting discussions of race and culture within a narrow historical frame which does not permit the breaking out of racial and cultural specificity. Whilst acknowledging the importance of a historical narrative in the genealogy of black Britishness, the texts which I will interrogate signal towards a new era “beyond multiculturalism” through their emphasis on transcultural, and what I will establish as cosmopolitan, interactions.

Paul Gilroy’s cultural study, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, has been a touchstone of black British critical theory since its publication in 1993. Gilroy’s argument, as delineated by Michael Keith, ‘that the historical traces that are inscribed constitutively through the black experience point him towards an *anti-anti-essentialism*’ of black British culture (Keith 20), configured his conceptualisation of black British culture within a triangulated Atlantic frame which prioritised the influence of African-American culture in literary and artistic studies of black British aesthetics. Gilroy, in the second paragraph of *The Black Atlantic*, states that ‘the contemporary black English . . . stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages’ (that of Europe and Africa) (*Black Atlantic* 1), but goes on later in the text to argue that it is the success of ‘transnational structures of circulation and intercultural exchange’ of African-American music with the black diaspora which has influenced the construction of a black British aesthetic (*Black Atlantic* 87). Gilroy’s diminishing of black British ties with European culture is problematised by the novels of Diana Evans and Bernardine Evaristo. In *The Wonder*

(2009), Evans's Jamaican choreographer Antoney finds his muse in a long-dead Polish-Russian ballet dancer; while with *Soul Tourists*, Evaristo sends her protagonists Stanley and Jessie on a European road trip which is "ghosted" by black European histories, and which similarly refuse African-American influence. The affiliative bonds between African-American and black European culture which Gilroy's more recent work highlights also ignore the reality of the increasing influence of black British cultural output in a contra-flow across the Atlantic, and, further, do not address the increasing gulf between the experiences of race on either side of the Atlantic.<sup>3</sup> I agree with Gilroy when he says, writing about the black European cultural presence, that

We need to be able to see how the presence of strangers, aliens, and blacks and the distinctive dynamics of Europe's imperial history have combined to shape its cultural and political habits and institutions. These dynamics cannot be understood as external to the workings of European political culture. They do not represent the constitutive outside of its modern and modernist life. They can be shown to be alive in the interior spaces and mechanisms through which Europe has come to know and interpret itself.

(‘A New Map of Europe’ xiv)

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<sup>3</sup> I am thinking here of the success of black British actors and directors in the USA, particularly Idris Elba in *The Wire* (2002-2008), David Harewood in *Homeland* (2011-2012), Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013), and David Oyelowo and Carmen Ejogo in *Selma* (2014). The phenomenon of black Britons taking on leading African-American roles and representations is a complex and fascinating subject, and one which is outside the remit of this study.

Despite arguing for an acknowledgement of black influence on the interiority of constructions of European life, Gilroy goes on to argue that black European culture is shaped by and indebted to African-American cultural transmission. Contrary to Gilroy's view, in the texts included here it is not through the primacy of African-American culture that the works inhabit their Europeanness. Indeed, where that culture is referenced in these novels, it is shown to be lacking the cultural markers which black Britons can identify with.<sup>4</sup> While Gilroy has acknowledged that one of the stumbling blocks to seeing black Europeans as integral to contemporary culture is the persistent misrepresentation of *all* black Europeans as 'migrants', it is ironically the perpetuation of Gilroy's black Atlantic framework which appears to stymie attempts to place black British and black European aesthetics within a newly articulated and evolving non-normative framework which acknowledges a new cohort of non-migrant, mixed-race writers.

In his more recent writing on nationalism and race, Gilroy has argued against the reification of race, whilst also highlighting the persistence of racist thought in contemporary multicultural societies. These stratifications are evident in the contemporary moment, and the reality of 'the multicultural approach [which] sees immigrant communities as somehow external to the nation' (*The Meaning of Race* 179), as identified by Kenan Malik, are of pressing concern. Indeed, Michael Keith has asked if 'the spaces that remain marked by everyday racisms of racial attacks, institutionalized disadvantage and systemic discrimination [can be] worthy of being the repositories of such hope?' (Keith 169). Given these debates, I am not arguing that black British writing is intrinsically dystopian. On the contrary, the tentative moments

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<sup>4</sup> The problematics of African-American culture in constructing a black English belonging will be explored further in my readings of Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* and Diana Evans's *The Wonder*.



of transcultural exchange to be found in the novels I will interrogate point to a hopefulness which is, nonetheless, mindful of the continuing realities of lived experience. Taking as a starting point a definition of multiculturalism as ‘a set of policies concerned with the management and *containment* of diversity by nation-states’ (Wise and Velayuthan 2, emphasis added), it is this idea of multiculturalism as *containment* which I contend is highlighted by the works investigated here. Amartya Sen’s characterisation of British multiculturalism as ‘plural monoculturalism’ is key to this discussion (157). Sen argues that, as manifested in contemporary transcultural communities, multiculturalism does not allow for equal exchange and flow of cultural mores, but rather divides communities along racial and ethnic lines (157). Malik responds convincingly to Sen, augmenting his argument with the observation that

where once the left had argued that everyone should be treated equally, despite their racial, ethnic, religious or cultural differences, now it pushed the idea that different people should be treated differently *because* of such differences . . .  
[British] multiculturalism has helped foster a more tribal nation [as a result].

(*Fatwa to Jihad* xix-xx, emphasis in orig.)

This ‘mutat[i]on into a celebration of cultural separation’ is emblematic of the failure of cellular multiculturalism to foster transcultural communication between groups who live alongside, but not amongst, one another in contemporary British cities (*Fatwa to Jihad* 54). It is my contention that the works investigated in this thesis problematise and expose these failures of contemporary multiculturalism to adequately invoke a post-racial, transcultural society.

Much established criticism in relation to black British writing has focussed on the post-war paradigms of migration and belonging as tropes integral to the conceptualisation of black British identity. David Ellis's *Writing Home: Black British Writing in Britain Since the War* (2007), James Procter's *Dwelling Places: Postwar black British writing* (2003), and Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004) all locate the post-war migrant experience of the late twentieth century, and the later youth uprisings of the London riots of the 1980s, as a framework for the expression of black British identity in literature. Ellis highlights British-Caribbean writers Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen, and Joan Riley to hypothesise that their texts 'simultaneously highlight the emergence of a black British personality distinct from its Caribbean forebears, and to be critical of that personality as part of British society' (*Writing Home* xiv). Ellis acknowledges that 'explor[ing] the colonial and post-colonial experience' does not lead to a wish for the 'consolidation of difference' in the work of these writers (*Writing Home* 174). According to Ellis, postwar black British writers made a conscious effort to contribute to the cultural life of the nation and so to intervene in "whitewashed" conceptions of British history and society. This is a perspective on the black British experience that, I would argue, the contemporary writers with whom I will engage have begun to leave in their wake, as their focus shifts from making a distinct contribution to the nation to embedding the nation transnationally in transcultural frames. This shift leads to an articulation of British subjectivity which moves away from the previously held racialised models of belonging. Whilst Ellis sees Phillips as 'pursuing the formation of a collective identity going beyond the post-war experience' (*Writing Home* 174-5), he limits his investigation of this 'going beyond' to the second generation and their struggle against racist backlash from the white British population. This is perfectly reasonable within the limits of Ellis's study, as the writers and texts with which he engages address a

second-generation politics of identity which Ellis skilfully renders. However, as I will show, in two of Phillips's recent novels – *A Distant Shore* (2003) and *In the Falling Snow* (2009) – his work has moved beyond the “writing home” framework to an interrogation of British-born and mixed-race black British subjects in a particularly English mode of being. In so doing he locates black British cultural life as established and no longer interventionist. He also explores the effect this racial inscription of Englishness has had on the way white Britons view their own sense of identity within the nation. His narrative historiography of three generations of men – post-war migrant, second generation British-born, and mixed-race – in *In the Falling Snow* encapsulates the racial genealogy of black Britishness as it has evolved over the latter half of the twentieth century. By entwining Keith's story with his migrant father's, and with the Eastern European migrants he finds himself involved with, Phillips charts a new racial space within England in which it is lack of citizenship, and not race, which defines one's position as a disenfranchised minority. This shift in minority ethnicities and black British genealogy has so far not been fully investigated by critics who still hesitate to engage with new paradigms of black Britishness beyond the migrant and second-generation experience.

In his work *Dwelling Places: Postwar black British writing* (2003) James Procter highlights the regional and class divides of black British identity as he investigates both regional locale and the tensions of “elitist” cosmopolitanism which lead to a ‘crisis in the coherence of Asian or black “Britishness”’ (162). He identifies the problematic nature of reading postcolonial authors as “speaking for” racial minorities, and the need to delineate the ‘politics of location’ as defining ‘the material site at which [black British] identities are played out’ (Procter 1). Procter successfully argues that the ‘monolithic’ historical context which has been placed on the black British experience as almost exclusively representing the migrants’ interaction with

the colonial metropole (London) renders Britain ‘a homogeneous unified flatland, as if it is somehow the same to be black in London as it is in Llandudno’ (1). In identifying the differing territorial pressures on “blackness” which exist outside of the metropole, he ‘examines the limits of a dislocated diaspora poetics’ (Procter 3) in the expression of postwar black Britishness. In focussing on the ‘dwellings’ of the black British community, Procter expresses the fluidity of Britishness, rather than heterogeneous outcomes of migration and belonging. However, like Ellis, his study is concerned with investigating historically both migrancy and the postwar identity politics of blackness, rather than looking to the future of black Britishness and its claims to a cosmopolitan belonging with which I am concerned. Procter may see cosmopolitanism as misrepresenting the identity and experience of black British groups living outside the metropolitan centre, but I would argue that, rather than being intellectually elitist, contemporary writers engaging with the cosmopolitan since 2000 are enabling a transcultural dialogue that the emphasis on locale and racialised identity may prohibit. Procter highlights the variation of the nation in its representation of black British experience, but I wish to expand the territorialised locale of blackness into an investigation of claims to Europe as an *alternative* “dwelling place”.

As previously noted, Mark Stein’s *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004) posits a black British *bildungsroman* as the site of black British transformative energy. Stein focuses on texts ‘whose outlook on Britain is multiply refracted and fractured’ (Stein xiv). While ‘argu[ing] for a model of plural alliances’ (Stein 17), he contends that black British literature ‘derives from its own *space*, yet this space is not homogenous in terms of time or culture or location, it is an imagined experiential field of overlapping tendencies’ (Stein 10, emphasis in orig.). Defining the spatiality of black Britishness does not, however, address the politicisation of the terminology, nor, as Dave Gunning has pointed out, does it fully

account for the ‘dominant and subordinate discourses [that] are forever subject to “processes of decomposition, renovation or neo-formation” as new meanings come into being and the political utility of these meanings is contested’ (*Race and Antiracism* 7). Stein defines his *bildungsroman* as belonging to those writers born in Britain, rather than those who have migrated to Britain, yet he struggles to break out of the paradigms of migrancy and familiar tropes of identity and belonging when engaging with their texts, and this somewhat limits the transformative energy of his readings. However, while acknowledging the debate around the limitations of the “black British” label, he argues that ‘the genre is uniquely suitable for . . . the redefinition of Britishness’ (Stein 94).

Stein’s notion of the black British *bildungsroman* is reminiscent of Bill Ashcroft’s theory of postcolonial textuality’s ‘poetics and politics of transformation’, in which ‘adapting and redirecting discursive power, creating new forms of cultural production’ (19) form the basis for textual intervention in an appropriation of imperialist discourse. Ashcroft argues that postcolonial writing is ‘peculiarly placed to initiate cultural transformation’ (21) due to its dynamic engagement with the discourses of texts written in English. The study is limited to literature located outside of England – the writing of postcolonial nations intervening with the production and distribution of “English” literature. In contrast, I argue that black British writing can be seen as transformative precisely because it is located “within” (a part of) English literature. Stein’s engagement with contemporary black British writing places it in a context of classical literature by relating it to the *bildungsroman*, and in so doing moves the poetics of transformation envisaged by Ashcroft into a new paradigm beyond an imperialist mapping of peripheral post-colonial countries interpolating their voices into the old dominant centre. By encouraging his readers to think of black British writing within a canonical frame, Stein reinterprets the ghettoisation of black

writers outside of accepted literary canons. The author and journalist Mike Phillips has written of this ghettoising that ‘black writers in Britain live in an environment where it’s taken for granted that their identity is defined and *limited* by the colour of their skins’ (*London Crossings* 147, emphasis added). Phillips argues that in the past this has led to black writers in Britain being ‘locked . . . into the framework of race and antiracism’ which led to the oppositional black/white particularism that prevented black British writing from addressing the changing face of British identities (*London Crossings* 151). In addition, this limiting of black writers to their skin colour leads to the elision of genre specificity, so that Mike Phillips, who primarily writes crime fiction, is read as a black British writer first and a crime writer second (if at all).

In his 2010 work *Race and Antiracism in black British and British Asian Literature*, Dave Gunning critiques Stein’s invocation of the *bildungsroman* as detaching ‘literary subjectivities informed by race . . . from wider networks of racial understanding and activity’ which, he contends, obscures the role of the wider community on the individual’s experience of race (10-11). In exploring the existing theoretical models, Gunning acknowledges that ‘the invocation of another place of belonging [Africa] could have contradictory outcomes for black Britons, providing a sense of pride but also requiring a possible turning away from the specificity of contemporary experience’ (14). In other words, previous theorisations of black Britishness as located in migrancy do not express black British realities, preventing as they do the articulation of a black Britishness which embraces both its diasporic routes and its claims to Britain as its birthplace. Additionally, these studies privilege the dismantling of the old empire and subsequent post-war migration from the new Commonwealth countries as inscribing race relations and black identity in Britain. It is my contention that over the past decade black British constructions of identity and belonging have begun to shift in focus from the migrant experience of ‘claiming’ Britishness, to an

exploration of belonging outside the confines of the black diaspora, and criticism is yet to engage with this representational shift.

Gunning proceeds to suggest that ‘the only types of identity that can be recognised are those guaranteed by ethnicity, even as the ethnic remains an unstable and contentious category’ (17). He highlights Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips as writers who offer a ‘conception of the individual as the only meaningful carrier of ethnicity’s moral worth’ whilst simultaneously ‘offer[ing] a vision of multiculturalism which deals with the interpersonal, rather than retreats into a notion of separate bounded communities’ (17). It is Gunning’s hypothesis of the individual agency of the ethnic subject which particularly interests me, rather than his arguments surrounding contemporary race and antiracism in Britain. If it is ethnicity, rather than race, which determines the individual, then the mutually determining character of the individual and hegemonic articulations of race bring Stein’s ‘burden of representation’ (30) into sharp relief. A focus on ethnicity ‘articulate[s] a move beyond the category of “race”’, rupturing the essentialism inherent when “blackness” and “racism” become the primary focus of enquiry, and enabling an inclusion of European-based ethnicities into the debate (Brooker 76). By invoking these new paradigms alongside Gunning’s existing work, I hope to forgo racial essentialism as reductive to the works of black British writers who are, with these contemporary texts, moving beyond the old frameworks of racial intervention in Britishness and identity. This thesis will expand upon theoretical representations of black British tropes by placing the work of Diana Evans, Bernardine Evaristo, Caryl Phillips and Zadie Smith within new contexts of cosmopolitanism and memory. This will bring into focus their attempts to articulate the contemporary experience of race and citizenship through an acknowledgement of black and European historiography. Eva Ulrike Pirker’s 2011 work *Narrative Projections of a Black British History* attempts to prescribe a ‘(black)

British historiography’, arguing that recent black British writing is ‘asserting the claim of an inclusion of black experiences within the stories, mythology, and iconography of the nation’s past’ (82). However, Pirker suggests that ‘individual experiences of West Indian post-war migrants have been more defining in their lives than the “significant moments” of a collective experience constructed in hindsight’ (83). I argue instead that it is this ‘collective experience’ that is, in fact, central to the shaping of new British communities. Pirker describes a ‘silence surrounding the history of black people in Britain’ (77), yet that history has been re-imagined by the work of Evaristo and Phillips in their works *The Emperor’s Babe* (2001) and *Foreigners: Three English Lives* (2008) respectively. These texts dispute the ‘whitewashing’ of British history and the resulting fallacy that before the period of emigration marked by the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948, there were no ‘black Britons’. Whilst Pirker holds up Phillips and Evaristo (amongst others) as devising fictional narratives which historicize black Britain and allow for ‘an exploration of a black diasporic history from a British perspective or context’ (78), she relies on the old trope of the post-war migrant and the black Atlantic as a framework for their re-telling of Britishness. Luisa Passerini’s recent critical essay ‘The Ethics of European Memory: What is to be done?’ postulates that the ‘myth of Europa . . . has become a part of *world memory* under construction, within which any new conception of European memory must be located and reformed’ (55, emphasis in orig.), concluding her argument with the assertion that ‘[n]ew European memories will be those that have the strength to transform’ (56). This transformation of black British writing to include European memory and heritage is what I identify in the works included in this thesis. Rather than linking historical narratives only to the migrant experience, I argue that these writers are beginning to make connections to an emerging sense of European



heritage, perhaps in recognition of, or as a logical conclusion to, the changing genealogy of race in Britain.<sup>5</sup>

It is pertinent, here, to establish what is meant by the particularisation of England and Europe in my construction of “black Britishness”. The authors whom I have chosen to examine here write from a place of English identity, and the construction of blackness in their works is placed within a specifically English frame.<sup>6</sup> Where their narratives follow alternative trajectories, those trajectories take us to Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. Therefore we must not only consider the African heritages which influence their sense of belonging, but also the European. In the past decade there have appeared a number of works which consider the interaction between transnationalism and the cosmopolitan from a European perspective.<sup>7</sup> Étienne Balibar, considering the possibility of the formation of a European transnational citizenship, argues that ‘what is at stake here is the definition of the *modes of inclusion and exclusion* in the European sphere (3, emphasis in orig.). He goes on to critique Europe as historically ‘multiple’ and ‘always home to tensions between numerous religious,

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<sup>5</sup> The importance of collective memory to a new formation of European cultural citizenship is explored in works such as *Collective Memory and European Identity: The Effects of Integration and Enlargement* (2005), edited by Klaus Eder and Wilfried Spohn; *Invisible Europeans? Black People in the “New Europe”*, edited by Les Back and Anoop Nayak; and *A European Memory? contested histories and politics of remembrance*, edited by Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on the European trajectories of black British writing. In later chapters I will utilise Michael Gardiner’s conceptualisation of the ‘revisions of Englishness’ to be found in contemporary English writing (not limited to black British literature).

<sup>7</sup> These include the edited collections *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (2009), *Cosmopolitanism and Europe* (2007), and *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (2004), the 2011 Special Issue of *Moving Worlds: Postcolonial Europe* (11:2); as well as monographs such as Michael Keith’s *After Cosmopolitanism? Multicultural cities and the future of racism* (2005), *Rethinking Europe: Social Theory and the implications of Europeanization* (2005) by Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, and *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (2004) by Etienne Balibar. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but serves to give an impression of the range of scholarly work currently being undertaken on the topic.

cultural, linguistic, and political affiliations, numerous readings of history, numerous modes of relations with the rest of the world' (5). In his reading of Europe as always already multiple, he allows for a recasting of Europe as able to accommodate and reflect its multi-ethnic communities. By advocating for a transnational citizenship informed by cosmopolitan discourse and facilitated by the European Union, he allows for a reconstitution of the place of race within formulations of the European. Similarly, Chris Rumford and Gerard Delanty argue in their text *Rethinking Europe* (2005) that European cosmopolitanism 'suggests more than the simple co-existence of difference, in the sense of multiculturalism. . . . the cosmopolitan perspective advocated here entails a recognition of the transformative dimension of societal encounters' (23). Taking as my model Michael Keith's theory of a contemporary cosmopolitanism which is both an 'acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of contemporary social reality' and 'a way of resolving the moral questions that arise from the attempt to reconcile different kinds of difference' (Keith 39), I wish to pursue the potentiality of a specifically European cosmopolitanism, which has evolved from its normative Kantian origins towards an inclusivity of belonging across racial and ethnic boundaries. In his work on the cosmopolitan city, Keith has argued that

in today's postcolonial London selective migrant affluence sits alongside racialised immiseration. The promise of the cosmopolitan is in no way irreconcilable with the perennial reinvention of racist intolerance. . . . But equally the city stages moments of communication, of uncertainty, through which forces of ethnicised and racialised closure are challenged.

(187)

This vision of cosmopolitan London can be seen in Caryl Phillips' rendering of the ambivalence of *In the Falling Snow's* protagonist Keith to the 'selective affluence' butting up against 'racialised immiseration' in the London of the novel. Keith's work for the local council's Race, Disability and Women's Affairs department highlights the contemporary crisis which the multicultural state finds itself grappling with. The casual way in which Keith, his family and friends produce an internal "hierarchy" of racisms against successive migrant groups, and Phillips's placement of Eastern European economic migrants in the place of the demonised "other" highlights the complexity of the interactions between multi-ethnic English characters and the white migrants who are the new scapegoats of the pressures on multiculturalism. Yet in Keith's interactions with the Eastern Europeans Danuta and Ralph the 'moments of communication, of uncertainty' that Michael Keith identifies are articulated. I will argue, in my reading of the novels included in this thesis, that black British writing is centrally involved with staging this emergent European cosmopolitanism.

By exploring the effect of memory and trauma on collective expressions of community, I will investigate Michael Rothberg's attempts to reconcile the historical with the personal, the individual with the collective. Rothberg posits his theory of multidirectional memory 'as a conceptual framework within which group histories converge and inform each other' (Whitehead 322). It is within this convergence that new community needs emerge from the public interactions of its diverse members. Rothberg, in writing about trauma studies, has argued that

[a]ttention to hybridity and heterogeneity need not distract from hierarchies of power . . . Rather, it can serve as part of a more thoroughgoing indictment of imperial politics and legacies that draws attention to the parallels as well as differences between forms of violence inside and outside the metropole.

(‘Decolonizing Trauma Studies’ 228)

Rather than a struggle for an individualised recognition which “whitewashes” and obscures other histories, memorialisation can therefore become a site for the articulation of other, comparative histories which have likewise shaped global identities. It is through these articulations that a collective, but not, in Rothberg’s terms, competitive, memory is expressed. In Rothberg’s attempt to ‘rethink the conceptualization of collective memory in multicultural and transnational contexts’ (*Memory* 21), he links together the experiences of disparate minority migrant groups – specifically linking Holocaust memory with the memory of decolonisation struggles – to formulate a multidirectionality which lays the foundation for further connections between cosmopolitan minority groups. In other words, Rothberg’s intersection of Holocaust memory with colonial memory foreshadows my intersection of black British memory with European memory.

Take, for example, Mike Phillips’s novel *A Shadow of Myself* (2000), which offers an exemplar of how we can apply multidirectional memory to black British literature. The novel explores the at-times fraught, but ultimately symbiotic relationship between the British mixed-race protagonist, Joseph, his half-brother, George, a ‘Schwarz-Russe’ (or ‘Black Russian’), and George’s Czech wife, Radka. Radka and George remember first-hand the Soviet Bloc’s ‘legacies of violence’ and as such are ‘confronted with the ghosts of the past at the same time that they experience the prejudices of the present’ (*Memory* 28) in their interracial relationship and experiences as migrants to Germany. Their contemporary struggle with European multiculturalism leads to a disassociation with their narrative memory and their respective relationships with their fathers, which all involve elements of trauma. The characters’ individual memories of prejudice and trauma, although not explicitly

communicated to each other, serve to bond them together across national, racial, and familial boundaries. The investigation of this movement towards the forging of understanding across the boundaries of race or nation into a cosmopolitan transcultural multidirectionality provides a new way of reading black British texts. Individual experiences of trauma and prejudice are shared by members of disparate minority communities in dialogue with one another – becoming not a memory of a shared event, but part of the shared narrative of their community as a whole.

It is my contention, then, that contemporary black British fiction contains an effort to converse ‘across boundaries of identity’ that affords the opportunity to transform fixed notions of Britishness and black Britishness within transcultural, multidirectional terms (Appiah *Cosmopolitanism* 85). The old paradigm of Paul Gilroy’s ‘black Atlantic’, I will suggest, is here superseded by a focus on the multidirectional and the cosmopolitan, and inherent within this is a European diasporic acknowledgement worth investigating. In moving forward from old paradigms and critical concerns, contemporary black British writing has tired of the Gilroyan ‘black Atlantic’, which hypothesised ‘a fluid and dynamic cultural system that escapes the grasp of nation-states and national conceptions of political and economic development’ (Gilroy *Small Acts* 71), while still privileging the nation-state as the site at which identity could be formed. Some postcolonial theory has been, and still is, preoccupied with ‘the idea that identity and culture are exclusively *national* phenomena’ and to the reduction of identity to essentialist notions of the other within the confines of the nation-state model (*Small Acts* 68, emphasis in orig.). I argue that contemporary black British writing rejects this reductive model of identity politics, and moves towards a globalised construction of cosmopolitanism. Gilroy has more recently espoused ‘conviviality’, a process of cross-cultural communication which informs the everyday metropolitan lives of cosmopolitan citizens and which he

believes has been concealed by the obsession with identity politics. Gilroy's discourse of conviviality differs from cosmopolitanism in that he argues for a 'renewed and much more direct confrontation with the issues of racial hierarchy and cultural diversity' (*After Empire* 18). Kwame Anthony Appiah's appeals to cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, while recognising and respecting difference, call for an end to the exaggeration of 'the foreignness of foreigners, the strangeness of strangers' (*Cosmopolitanism* xxi). While he acknowledges the contested nature of his terminology, Appiah relegates difference and diversity to fad-ism: 'whatever loss of difference there has been, they are constantly inventing new forms of difference: new hairstyles, new slang' (*Cosmopolitanism* 103).<sup>8</sup> He appeals therefore to the commonality between peoples rather than the recognition of lingering neo-imperialism – he sees in the globalised world a post-racial, rather than a new racist, future.

Appiah's appeal for cross-cultural communication perceives the 'imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel, or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own' (*Cosmopolitanism* 85) as primary to the beginning of a 'universal concern and respect for legitimate difference' (*Cosmopolitanism* xv) which he views as the logical aim of the challenge to cosmopolitanism. This being the case, black British writing has a significant role to play in the transcultural exchanges inherent in the era of globalisation. I hope to show

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<sup>8</sup>Elsewhere Bruce Robbins and Scott Malcomson have argued for an 'actually existing cosmopolitanism' that 'should not and perhaps cannot accept the old cosmopolitan ideal of transcending the distinction between strangers and friends' (Robbins 'Introduction' 3) as it acknowledges the inherent differences in culture and heritage between globalised groups. In addition, David Held has points to a 'trajectory of change' that moves towards 'a multipolar world, where the West no longer holds a premium on geopolitical or economic power' (Held 3) which in turn affects the conception of the cosmopolitan in the contemporary world, and sets limits on the primacy of local affiliations (Held 15).

that contemporary black British writing has put aside its historical concerns with finding “legitimate” identities and has instead shifted its gaze towards the critical exploration of culture as absorbing changes, resisting the natural inclination towards homogeneity, and refusing the ‘enforcement of diversity’ (*Cosmopolitanism* 105) that is liberal multiculturalism’s legacy. In other words, to find an expression of blackness is not to reject the European aspects of one’s cultural heritage in order to favour the African diaspora, but to converse across the European and the black Atlantic to reach a place of multidirectional communication.

Berthold Schoene, in exploring the cosmopolitan novel, has queried whether

[w]hereas traditionally the novel has been studied in intimate association with the rise of the nation-state, might increasing globalisation currently be prompting the development of a less homebound and territorialist subgenre of the novel, more adept than its national and postcolonial counterparts at imagining global community?

(12)

Schoene asserts that the cosmopolitan novel has superseded the concerns of the national as a ‘practice of communal world-narration’ (13) of which postcolonial novels, by contrast, concerned as they are with ‘imperialism’s core-periphery axiomatic’, are incapable (25). However, Schoene asserts that the aim of cosmopolitan novelists is ‘to reveal the anachronism of . . . hegemonic distinctions between self and other’ (25). The black British writers I explore are similarly concerned with how the self integrates into a public collective that communicates with the global community, and not merely within the national, circumscribed sphere. If, as Schoene asserts, historical concerns are fluid and present in the everyday, then the cosmopolitan allows

for narrative history to be reinterpreted in the light of inter-cultural memorialisation. Hence cosmopolitan becomes a dynamic force for the articulation of self, in a way that multiculturalism and globalisation had not previously permitted. Black British writers' concern with looking both across the black Atlantic and towards Europe admits the formation of a world narrative in which memory and culture is communicated across racial and national boundaries in a multidirectional confluence of voices and experience.

In his writing on cosmopolitanism, Simon Gikandi recognises his privileged position of 'postcolonial flaneur', the man who is the 'informed spectator of the urban class' (22) able to move freely and without boundary across the globe. The presence of refugees and asylum seekers, those who traverse the globe without such freedom, whose movement is forced rather than voluntary, 'threaten [his] identity as a cosmopolitan' because they are 'signs of a dislocated locality' (23) who disestablish the privilege that cosmopolitanism affords. The conversations across boundaries of identity which I identify speak to the ability of everyday cosmopolitanism to reinscribe the stratifications inherent within discussions of the cosmopolitan. As Laura Chrisman has argued, 'the same market economy that "frees" Appiah works to "unfree" non-metropolitan peoples' (158). Yet class considerations do not necessarily exclude non-Western peoples from a 'freely created cosmopolitan cultural identity' (Chrisman 157), and Appiah himself concedes that his notions of cosmopolitanism are 'the name not of the solution but the challenge' (*Cosmopolitanism* xv). It is important therefore for criticism to acknowledge the contradictory nature of relying on a cosmopolitan outlook without discounting it as 'the latest camouflage for Western power' (Spencer 15). The nuances of cosmopolitanism require a much more sensitive reading of its influence and aspirations, counterpointed by its efforts to bring about an inclusive world memory across borders and boundaries. These tensions can



be further explored by returning to Eva Ulrike Pirker's view that 'the transnational strand in black British literature is by no means a theme of the past, but continues to be a path followed by young black British writers' (79). However, this depiction of black British writing as broadly inclusive of cosmopolitan interests should not obscure the differences inherent in black British perspectives which include both black and European diasporic perspectives from a position of first world privilege. Rather, as Graham Huggan has pointed out in reference to what he terms 'postcolonial Europe', this can be seen as 'the *unmaking* of Europe as a space of exemplarity, exception, and privilege, but also the *remaking* of Europe as a convivial space of inclusiveness, transcultural ferment, and openness', allowing a new, cosmopolitan black British conversation to emerge (1).

If we consider multidirectional memory as intervening within conventional notions of cosmopolitanism, then, Rothberg's thinking furthers Appiah's hope that cross-cultural conversation 'helps people get used to one another' (*Cosmopolitanism* 85), contending that a sharing of histories allow disparate peoples to understand each other. Through the process of sharing they are released from the 'plural monoculturisms' of 'distinct cultures . . . remain[ing] in secluded boxes' (Sen 157), which in turn allows for greater interaction and understanding. This prompts me to expand Rothberg's theory into a hypothesis that transcultural communications facilitated by shared memory lead to the establishment of multidirectional communities. Yet I am acutely aware of Rothberg's warning that 'all intercultural memory does not foster cross-cultural understanding' (*Memory* 29). Rather than envisaging multidirectional communities as a kind of utopian cosmopolitanism, I see them as facilitating ethical communication around issues of cultural narrative, representation and memorialisation. In so doing, the community sheds the insular

nature of multiculturalism and embraces Appiah's conversational model of cosmopolitanism.

I have chosen the four authors included in this study based on the cosmopolitan and European themes which I have identified in their post-2000 texts. In including both established, critically and publically well-known authors such as Smith and Phillips alongside the emergent voices of Evans and Evaristo, I hope to highlight a clearly discernible paradigmatic shift in twenty-first century black British writing. The inclusion of Phillips, who has published ten works of fiction since his debut novel *The Final Passage* (1985), is useful as a "bridge" between the black Atlanticism of the late twentieth century, and the multidirectional moments discernible in his recent work. The shift in focus between his early work and the two novels included in this study are examples of a break with the genealogical model of black British writing, and indexes the shifting paradigmatic trajectories that I highlight in the work of Smith, Evans, and Evaristo.

In order to evidence this conceptual bridge between the black Atlantic and multidirectional memory, my first chapter will investigate two of Caryl Phillips's recent novels, *A Distant Shore* (2003), and *In the Falling Snow* (2009). Phillips, born in St Kitts, was brought to England at just a few weeks old, and lived with his parents and brother in Leeds until he left for university at Oxford in the 1980s. As a writer his work has been preoccupied with the African diaspora, and particularly with the triangulation of Africa-Caribbean-England. Yet, increasingly, his recent novels have concerned themselves not with the global, historical state of "blackness", but instead with the particular concerns of contemporary transcultural English communities. I argue that in the two novels discussed, Phillips presents a critique of multiculturalism as increasingly unable to address the complexity of contemporary English communities. In my reading of *A Distant Shore* I will focus on the ways in which

Phillips highlights the ability of individual acts of communication and sharing to gesture towards an inclusive and hospitable Englishness. In linking Phillips's narrative with existing scholarship on "the camp" by Paul Gilroy, Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, and David Farrier, I hope to show that the England of *A Distant Shore* posits the potential breaking down of communal boundaries as redemptive on both an individual and national level. In this way Phillips expresses a faith in the capacity of the individual to transcend problematic discourses of homogeneity which lead to exclusionary modes of being. I will then discuss Phillips's 2009 novel *In the Falling Snow*. I will argue that it delivers an examination of Anglo-centric multicultural diaspora that incorporates new European migration around a central narrative focussed on the familiar trope of post-war "new Commonwealth" migration, and in doing so problematises the influence that migration has on contemporary articulations of Englishness. As is critically well-discussed, Phillips's writing about the 'Atlantic triangle' of the African diaspora, and its implications on ideas of home and identity for the migrant have been leading concerns in his fiction. With *In the Falling Snow*, Phillips recasts familiar diasporic tropes and therefore expands the limits of cultural memory in critically unfamiliar and even vitally post-racial ways. He does this in part through inclusion of Eastern European migrants whose experiences of England are circumscribed by a narrow view of "Englishness" at the community level. The novel indexes a distrust of migrant groups as a whole, irrespective of race or ethnicity, amongst the inhabitants of contemporary English cities. I will argue that the novel gestures towards the need for transnational community-building within contemporary English society in its rendering of the protagonist Keith's interactions with the Eastern European migrants Danuta and Ralph. In viewing Phillips's construction of a narrative of memory through Michael Rothberg's multidirectional lens, I produce a reading of the novel which highlights its

critique of the current pressures on the policies of multiculturalism. This leads to a problematized and ambivalent rendering of the promise of cosmopolitan communities who, if they utilise collective memory in order to build a transcultural society, can solidify a new, inclusive Englishness.

My second chapter will discuss Zadie Smith's critically-acclaimed London novels, *White Teeth* (2000) and *NW* (2012). I will argue that Smith's location of her story in the fixed, cellular multiculturalism of the late twentieth-century is, in fact, a critique of the regressive policies of multicultural Britain. In re-positioning Smith's novel at the head of the twenty-first century, rather than the tail end of the "long twentieth century", I hope to facilitate a reading of *White Teeth* which heralds a new way of approaching representations of London as a cosmopolitan city-space. In so doing, I will reject a reading of the novel as 'represent[ing] an optimistic view of multi-culturalism' (Squires 41), arguing instead that Smith's at times aggressive use of satire is more usefully read as a cosmopolitan critique of the communities which have sprung up in multicultural London. I will argue that, in reflecting on the 'imagined past' of her diasporic characters, she allows a reading of the novel as a repudiation of the constraints of liberal multiculturalism, and instead opens up a discussion of English communities within the framework of a non-privileged cosmopolitanism. In turning to Smith's most recent novel, in which she returns to the locale of *White Teeth*, I will examine how *NW* locates itself within a specifically black British socio-economic critique. Smith's use of the city space to conceptualise the multiple and yet individualised locales of London exposes the dangers of traversing those spaces. Yet she proposes, too, an alternative to the excesses of wealth and upward social mobility rampant in the City before the economic downturn. As I will argue, Smith's novel highlights the problematic intersection of the everyday lived reality of the contemporary cosmopolitan city with the economic aspirations of

twenty-first century classed experience. Smith's communities are constrained by localised spheres of influence, but within these localised spheres comes the opportunity to exist on a transformative global economic and social level through the transnational interaction of migrant individuals and contemporary consumer culture. By relocating cosmopolitanism within the everyday sphere, Smith embeds the local within, rather than existing without, the communities contained in urban multicultures. However, I show how the psychological failure of individual attempts to transcend constrained boundaries of influence and open up spaces of mobility and fluidity leads to the "suspended cosmopolitanism" which I locate in my reading of the novel.

In my third chapter I introduce the novels of Diana Evans. Evans, whose father is Nigerian and mother white English, spent time in both countries as a child. Her first novel, *26a* (2005), charts the childhood of twins Georgia and Bessie, chronicling Georgia's struggle with depression and eventual suicide. The narrative interweaves a Yoruban magical realism into the tale, and ends with Georgia inhabiting her twin sisters' body after her death. My reading of *26a* will examine three key themes of the novel - those of 'home', 'mirroring', and mental illness – and posit that while the subjects of alienation, foreignness, and psychic splitting of earlier migrant Caribbean and African literature are present in the novel, in *26a* these three themes function differently and conclude in much more positive ways than that of post-war migrant writing. The novel's four sisters, Bessi, Georgia, Kemy, and Bel, struggle to synthesise their cross-cultural involvements and what I term mirrored, rather than twinned, experiences with their particular sense of self-identification. It is only through coming to terms with a cosmopolitan being-in-the-world that the sisters begin to reconcile their English and Nigerian heritages. Evans' second novel, *The Wonder* (2009), is also concerned with the trajectory of black British genealogies. Her

protagonist, Lucas, lives aboard a houseboat with his sister Denise following the deaths of their parents. At twenty-five he feels restless, and begins to explore the forgotten, hidden world of his father Antoney's 1960s dance troupe, the Midnight Ballet. The novel's narrative trajectory follows the troupe's ill-fated European tour, and the figure of Russian turn-of-the-century ballet star Vaslav Nijinsky. I will argue that, rather than perpetuating existing tropes of migrant or African literature, Diana Evans's work suggests another kind of being in the world, offering Europe as an alternative trajectory for the black Briton, and cosmopolitanism as an alternative to the problematic generational model of other black British literatures.

In order to illustrate what I identify as a move towards a multi-locational constitution of Englishness by contemporary black writers, and to identify a conceptual thread which runs from this introduction through the body of my thesis, my final chapter will return to Bernardine Evaristo's 2009 revision of her debut novel-in-verse, *Lara*. In my reading of the work, I will argue that the revision of Evaristo's narrative gives dramatic voice to the changing face of black British writing, and in particular I will investigate the ways in which Evaristo and her contemporaries demonstrate contemporary articulations of Englishness. In moving beyond the Black Atlantic paradigm, I identify the expanded European narrative of *Lara*, in which the eponymous protagonist's Irish and German genealogical trajectories are set alongside the African and Brazilian narratives, which have previously been read as aligning Evaristo's texts with black Atlanticism. Rather than laying them upon this Gilroyan trajectory, I argue that the parallel narratives of migrant histories mapped in the revised edition, as well as Evaristo's triangulation of England with Africa and South (significantly, not North) America, is a rejection of the privileging influences of African-American experience envisioned by Gilroy's black Atlantic, and exposes the failure of the black Atlantic to adequately account for the histories of multi-locational

subjects. My reading will draw on contemporary conceptualizations of Englishness, and locate *Lara* as concerned with expressing both the multipositionality of Englishness, and the inadequacy of the parameters within which we approach black British writing.

I will conclude the chapter with a reading of Evaristo's 2005 novel-with-verse, *Soul Tourists*. *Soul Tourists* imagines a reclamation of black histories in which the direction of travel is not across the familiar triangulation of the black Atlantic, but rather east, across Europe. In *Soul Tourists*, her protagonists Stanley and Jessie embark on an impulsive and ill-advised road trip across Europe to Turkey, and eventually the Middle East, encountering the "ghosts" of black European history along the way. As my study of the text will show, this journey is not a return to Englishness, or even to the European – Stanley and Jessie part acrimoniously in Kuwait, and their journeys are never completed – but instead, seeks tenuous cultural connections across the lines of national boundaries and accepted histories. As such, Evaristo's text goes beyond reclamation, in its narrative articulation of a black European self-hood. The novel allows for a newly determined articulation of cultural affiliation which is not determined within diasporic liminalities, but along a new trajectory of European narrative which allows for an articulation of cultural histories relevant not just to migrant or second-generation Europeans, but to all Europeans. In locating these new trajectories, I envisage a writing of affiliation, similar to that posited by Edward Said. I argue that, similarly to *Lara* (and perhaps prefiguring Evaristo's revision of the earlier text), this narrative moves away from the black Atlantic in creating an affiliative connection to the Europe through the figure of Stanley. Stanley's Europeanness is intertwined with his understanding of black European histories, and as such his evolving consciousness is connected to particular

historical moments which the narrative draws into an affiliative black subjecthood, and which move forward from the “natal” black Atlantic.

Subsequently, in the works interrogated in this thesis, there is an emphasis on the claims to cultural heritage – be they African, Caribbean, or European – that highlights the potential of contemporary black British literature to empower transcultural communication across disparate trajectories and experiences. I argue that interrogating the emerging paradigms of black British writing unearths a framework from which to proceed from the problematic policies of multiculturalism towards a focus on multidirectional and cosmopolitan inclusivity within transcultural communities. Those who claim that the British multicultural ‘experiment’ has failed – who believe that to be British is to be mutually exclusive and set apart from race or ethnicity – or, in Gilroy’s terms to ‘contract into a category of administrative convenience’ (*Small Acts* 75) – believe that the failure of multiculturalism sounds the death-knell for hybrid communities. I argue instead that moving forward from the ambiguity of liberal multiculturalism affords the opportunity to transform fixed notions of Britishness with a cosmopolitan, transcultural, multidirectional discourse. I wish to interrogate the implications for collective cultural histories, narrative and memory in which critical theories of cosmopolitanism and multidirectional memory intervene. Ultimately, I will hypothesise a transformative energy within contemporary black British fiction as it moves on from the language of identity, crosses the boundaries of nationhood and memory, and offers a new vocabulary for the articulation of cultural belonging and ‘Englishness’.



## Chapter One

### Contemporary Englishness in the work of Caryl Phillips

In hypothesising the transformative energy of contemporaneous black British writing, I begin my study by turning to the work of author and essayist Caryl Phillips. His publication of eleven novels and five works of non-fiction over the past three decades mark him as one of the most prolific and sustained writers of black British literature. As I will argue, Phillips's work can be seen to reflect and articulate black British belonging in the contemporary period, but also to chart an evolution of black British diasporic thought. His most recent collection of essays, *Colour Me English* (2011), explores the transcultural possibilities located within contemporary iterations of Englishness. The introduction, specifically written for the collection, opens with an autobiographical narrative in which Phillips recalls an experience from his childhood in Leeds. Phillips's narrative recalls the schoolyard torment of Ali, a new student and the only Muslim boy in the school (just as previously Phillips had been the lone black student). In some ways, the theme explored in the piece is a commonplace one – that of the childhood outcast, bullied for being different. The teasing is, of course, racially inflected, but the young Phillips reckons that it is also because Ali is quiet, shy, and 'predictably bad at games' – an anathema to the peacocking teenage boys of the school ('Colour Me English' 4). While at first Phillips joins in with the teasing, he slowly comes to the realisation that he and Ali share the commonality of 'the practical aspects of getting on in England as a non-white child' (5). Yet despite this affinity, Phillips recognises that, as a Christian West Indian boy, 'take race out of the equation and I had no place to hide from the English. Culturally, I was very much like them' (7). This sets him apart from Ali, whose Islamic faith would lead to 'the type of hostility that renders any thoughts of participation a distant, and decidedly unlikely, dream'.

Through his connection of his memories of Ali with his shock at the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 suicide bombings by four young British-born Muslim men, Phillips weaves a narrative which interrelates his failed attempt at cross-cultural identification with Ali to the hostility of the nation in dealing with cultural outsiders. Phillips proceeds to insist that

successful integration does mean that immigrants adapt to the new country, but it also means that the new country adapts to them. It demands that the residents cultivate the capacity – and the courage – to change their ideas about who *they* are.

(15, emphasis in orig.)

It is this *insistence* upon change that Phillips explores in two of his recent novels, *A Distant Shore* (2003) and *In the Falling Snow* (2009). In the novels the English characters of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds attempt to redefine themselves in proximity to alternative cultural influences. In both novels he crafts a complex rendering of this struggle of adaptation. In *A Distant Shore* the white retiree Dorothy is cast as experiencing ‘a doubleness – belonging and internal exile’ (Clingman ‘England has Changed’ 50), alongside her ‘mirror’, the figure of Gabriel/Solomon, an African refugee. *In the Falling Snow*’s protagonist, Keith, is a middle-aged black Briton whose problematic relationships with his father and son lead to a crisis of selfhood following the breakdown of his marriage. His half-hearted attempts to seduce a young Eastern European migrant, Danuta, expose the multiple, complex layers of cultural belonging and outsidership in contemporary English communities, and reveal that being “white” is perhaps no longer the primary cultural marker of Englishness.

As evidenced by his measured responses to both American and British social policy after the crises of the terrorist attacks on New York and London, Phillips’s

recent work has cast the social and political life of the nation as foundering under the illusion that we have entered a 'post-racial' age. Acknowledging the attacks of 2001 and 2005 as a point of departure, I will explore how Phillips's narratives have shifted locale from the diasporic black Atlantic to England's terra firma, and what this means for the conceptualisations of Englishness contained in the novels. I identify in his fictional narratives a new communitarianism, in which he projects a distinct, cosmopolitan vision of England 'that bears rupturing and indeed thrives on recurrent resemblage' through the interplay of cultural memory between disparate members of the community (Schoene 21). In particular I will investigate how the two novels work to transform received notions of Englishness as they posit new trajectories for myriad iterations of Englishness, and place emphasis on cross-cultural acts of communication within a specifically English locale.

In 1986 and again in 1991, Phillips was interviewed by Frank Birbalsingh as part of a Canadian radio series. This set of interviews would later be published in the series *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (1996). In these interviews he argues that 'the writing of my contemporaries is about the struggle to be accepted' (185). He goes on to insist that 'to limit myself to Britain only for my subject matter would make me a protest writer, merely an extension of the university sociology faculty, would prevent me from being seen as a writer *per se*' (187). Accordingly, Phillips's early narratives were predominantly located across what he saw as the 'vitally interrelated' experiences of European, American, and Caribbean blackness – the geographical location of Paul Gilroy's theoretical black Atlantic (192). These narratives deal with a diasporic dislocation which appears central to the formation of black British subjectivity. However, with *A Distant Shore*, *In the Falling Snow* and *Colour Me English*, Phillips moves forward from the language of diaspora theory to conceptualise belonging within an English framework, and examines how the

individual can come to terms with the realities of transcultural English communities. I will therefore locate the two novels as both more “settled”, but at the same time, more cosmopolitan in outlook, than Phillips’s other fictions.

Recently, Andrew Mycock, writing in the context of post-devolution Englishness, hypothesised that the

reluctance amongst some minority migrant communities to express issues of nationality and citizenship in English terms reflects enduring concerns regarding the racialized content of English identity, though some contextualise Englishness as a distinctive [white] identity within a broader multicultural civic Britishness.

(20)

In the context of Phillips’s early work, a connection can be drawn between his reluctance to engage with nationalism and Mycock’s hypothesis that the very definition of ‘Englishness’ which migrant or black British writers contend with engages a racialized dislocation of belonging that precludes an articulation of black Englishness. Yet in the context of the two novels investigated here, Phillips does not preclude an identification with Englishness – on the contrary, as my reading will show, he problematizes the primacy of whiteness to English identity through the multiple belongings to Englishness of migrant and black characters, and the internal exile of his white characters. Phillips’s narratives engage with the idea of ‘the English nation and state [as] simultaneously national, multinational, and transnational’ (Mycock 18). According to Mycock, this fluidity of nation and nationalism stemmed not just from the lived reality of the “united” kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Wales and the cross-current cultural influences that union engendered, but also from

the experiences of colonial emigration and return which were a common part of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century English life (19). This fluidity continues in the present day as increased inter-European migration, coupled with an influx of migrants from a destabilised Africa and Middle East combine to put pressure on the idealised liberal multiculturalism of the late 1990s. It is my contention that, rather than rejecting a claim to Englishness, *A Distant Shore* and *In the Falling Snow* reiterate the fluidity of Englishness as a cultural concept in their depiction of the individual's traversal of the contemporary community. No longer does Phillips's fiction only 'allegorically address the present' (Ledent *Caryl Phillips* 13) – rather, I will argue that with these two novels he critiques and vitally expands conceptions of the contemporary. My reading of the two novels will therefore focus on the shift in Phillips's writing from a black Atlanticist identity politics to an exploration of cosmopolitan English modes of belonging, and an attempt on Phillips's part to encourage conversations across subjectivity.

In 2001, Caryl Phillips smuggled himself into the Sangatte Red Cross camp near Calais in France, later writing about his experiences there for the *Guardian* newspaper.<sup>9</sup> His ruse did not fool the guards for long, but, in his short time inside the camp he meets two West African men, taking them for a drink in a French village pub. Phillips's account of his journey to Sangatte, rather than conducting an expose of the conditions of the camp itself, is an examination of the particular mentalities of those involved in the contemporary experience of asylum seeking – both of the refugees and of those who come into contact with them. In so doing, his piece engages with contemporary theories of the camp, in which

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<sup>9</sup> The *Guardian* article, 'Strangers in a Strange Land', was later re-printed in Phillips's 2011 non-fiction collection, *Colour Me English*, in the sub-section 'Distant Shores' (London: Harker Sackville). Page references refer to the *CME* edition of the article.

the emergence of camp thinking, militaristic, camp-style nationality, and encamped ethnicity – the key features of the first kind of camps – have been implicated in the institution of the second variety: first genocidal death spaces in which victims were assembled and then, bewilderingly, the refugee camps in which yesterday’s killers became victims and reached out to seek aid and compassion.

(Gilroy *Between Camps* 86)

Paul Gilroy argues that in the contemporary world these “camp mentalities” are entrenched in exclusionary extra-legal engagement with migrant refugees and asylum seekers. With both ‘Strangers in a Strange Land’ and *A Distant Shore*, Phillips investigates this exclusionary mode of thinking that has become rooted in anti-immigration rhetoric and epitomised by camps such as Sangatte, and which lead to a conflicted testimony of migration.

In his initial recounting of Sangatte Phillips observes that ‘Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians still comprise the majority’, and later one of the West African refugees, Jacob, tells him ‘the only racism is between us and the Red Cross people. At present there are only three of us from Africa, but I know they don’t want us there’ (‘Strangers’ 283, 287). The African refugees are set in opposition with their Middle Eastern counterparts, occupying a space of tension in which the two groups reject the common perception of diaspora as ‘incompatible with . . . nationalist and raciological thinking’ (Gilroy *Between Camps* 125), as their very presence in the camp confirms and deepens the divides between the two groups in the eyes of the nation’s potentially receiving them. Phillips’s article works to expose this tension, not only in the way he portrays the energy of the Africans in opposition to the broken spirits of the Afghans and Iraqis

– Manuel is described as ‘far too resourceful’ not to eventually succeed in staying in Europe, while ‘an Afghani squats on his haunches and contorts his body into a twisted sculpture that describes misery’ (‘Strangers’ 287) – but also by investigating the hypocrisy of ideas of the “worthy” and the “unworthy” refugee. By bookending his description of the two groups of refugees with a third conversation, held between himself and “Cheshire-man”, a Briton who has moved to Sangatte to work on the Channel Tunnel, Phillips also uses his investigation of the camp to expose the British unease with global asylum-seeking. “Cheshire-man” espouses many of the racial arguments used against immigration, as ‘[h]aving offloaded his opinions on their hygiene, and insisted that they really have money, he begins to advocate applying lethal shocks to them, or simply shooting them’ (287), as he likens them to vermin overrunning property. Yet when asked by Phillips if he will return to England, he cites economic reasons for wanting to stay, as he explains that ‘the standard of living is cheaper’ (287). With this, the man’s hypocrisy is exposed – his experience of migrant life is paralleled with that of the African Jacob, who wishes only to work as a mechanic, with the potential to earn far more money in mainland Europe than in his own country. Phillips’s oppressive recounting of the lack of hope and opportunity for both the economic and the political migrants attempting to “reach” England captures the mood of the “internees” at the camp.

Jacob and Manuel, despite their differing positions of migrancy, articulate the same reasons for preferring to attempt to claim asylum in England, rather than France – common language, already-established communities, and the opportunity for work. In introducing the narrative of the “Cheshire-man”, Phillips invites the reader to challenge her own perception of migration and inclusion, as the refugees are passed by ‘[c]ars, many with British plates’ on the French side of the English Channel (287). The significance of naming is also important – Phillips humanizes the African

migrants by naming them, while the un-named “Cheshire-man” functions as a cipher for the complacency of nations unwilling to deal with the realities of modern refugee movement. It is this engagement with migration, and the tension it reveals both between and within communities, which exposes the challenge to accepted theories of diaspora and the camp motif.

Phillips’s experiences of Sangatte influenced and shaped the story of Solomon (nee Gabriel), the African migrant protagonist of *A Distant Shore*. The novel explores the contemporary, intertwining narratives of Solomon, and that of a middle-class white English divorcee, Dorothy.<sup>10</sup> Solomon and Dorothy’s faltering attempts at friendship across racial and social boundaries are observed as the crux of the ‘change’ at the very heart of England. Solomon, who as a young man is caught up in civil war and becomes a militia leader, eventually flees his home country after witnessing the brutal killing of his parents and sisters, and finds himself a ‘one-year old man’ when he arrives in England, having smuggled himself into the country by clinging to the side of a container ship (*A Distant Shore* 300). He feels unable to share with others the brutal nature of his exile, or even his former name, Gabriel, changing it to Solomon. Taking a job in a non-descript English town, as the caretaker on a new-build estate, brings Solomon into Dorothy’s sphere and their relationship forms the ambiguous centre of the novel. Dorothy’s narrative is also one of unbelonging, although her experiences are markedly different to those of Solomon’s experience as a stateless outsider. Dorothy ‘embodies the dislocation of a person who is in her own home without feeling at home’ as she negotiates the unfamiliar space of village-dweller and retiree (Bonnici 287). Her dislocation is therefore also socio-cultural. As

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<sup>10</sup> Phillips’s protagonist changes his name shortly after his arrival in England; for the purposes of this study I will refer to him as he is referred to in the text, so will use the names Solomon and Gabriel interchangeably.



an elderly, professional, divorced woman who moves into an insular village environment, she is regarded with both suspicion and envy. Dorothy's sense of dislocation becomes more pronounced as the novel progresses, and after the crisis point of Solomon's brutal death at the hands of a local racist gang, Dorothy falls victim to her accelerated mental decline and is hospitalised, the final scene of the novel taking place in the ward of a local psychiatric facility.

In his attempt to expose the interstices of Dorothy and Solomon's disparate narratives, Phillips reveals each figure's story through a strategically non-linear structure. The novel moves through five narrative sections, in which the reader alternates between the narratives of Dorothy, Gabriel, and Gabriel-as-Solomon. Stephen Clingman's analysis of the novel in his recent monograph *The Grammar of Identity* (2009) reflects that

[Dorothy's] is an account filled with disruptive internal recursions, where events come out of sequence . . . but rather than reflecting any deliberate re-ordering, Dorothy's narrative reveals primarily that sequence is beyond her.

(95)

The fractured form of the novel is revealed, through Clingman's careful reading, to be representative of the internal fractures and limitations of Dorothy's mental state. In turn, the recursive narrative of Gabriel/Solomon explores 'transnational faultlines within national space' (*Grammar of Identity* 94). The formal complexity of the narrative allows Dorothy's and Solomon's individual stories of trauma and grief to be told through the gradual revelation of their individual consciousness, rather than the performed and direct "telling" of their accounts. Alessandra Di Maio argues that in having the novel 'follow the loop of [Dorothy's] deranged mind' and 'Solomon's

fragmented narrative' (256), Phillips imbues both protagonists with a discourse befitting the representation of the displaced diasporic subject. The reader, required to create their own connections across narrative styles, non-linear recollections, and obfuscations of consciousness, becomes implicated in the revelatory aspects of their individual stories.

As previously noted, both 'Strangers in a Strange Land' and *A Distant Shore* engage with ideas around camp mentalities, a much-discussed area of asylum theory. Paul Gilroy characterises the national 'camp mentality' as 'constituted by appeals to "race", nation, and ethnic difference' (*Between Camps* 83). This mentality works to reject the diasporic nature of arrival by entrenching ideas of purity and absolutism into an established national framework of culture and belonging. In his brief engagement with the two West African men in Sangatte, Phillips exposes camp mentality as being entrenched not only in the nation receiving the refugees, but in the refugees themselves and the institutions set up to assist them. Similarly, Gilroy argues that the tendency of modern nation-states is to constitute camps in terms of a militant nationalism of exclusion. He positions diaspora theory as a natural rejoinder to the ideology of absolute identities as it 'demands that we attempt to evaluate the scattering process against the supposed uniformity of that which has been scattered' (*Between Camps* 125). In other words, the migrants of the diaspora should be incapable by definition of the kind of exclusionary identities which Gilroy terms the 'camp mentalities' of modern nation-states. Yet the 'supposed uniformity' of the migrants is a uniformity not only imposed on them by a hostile host, but in fact the migrants become complicit in exclusionary thinking, as evidenced by Phillips's experiences of Sangatte. Although Gilroy recognises the tendency of diasporic groups to cling their traditional culture, he decries it as arresting cultural development and denying the living nature of culture and tradition, placing the onus on the individual to create an

identity devoid of ethnic or racial logos (*Between Camps* 84). However, in this appeal to the individual migrant there is a reluctance to recognise the implicit divisions in the hierarchy of contemporary migration, and the exclusionary nature of diasporic groups themselves. Migrants whose experience is outside of the accepted ethnic, religious or cultural boundaries of the established diasporic community often find themselves excluded by both the nation receiving them, and the expatriate community they seek to join. In other words, when the receiving attitude is that of judging the “worthy” and the “unworthy”, it precludes the migrant from being seen as a uniform entity, either by the host or by the migrant.

Gilroy is not alone in pointing out the difficult axis on which ideas of culture and race are set in conflict. Kenan Malik, writing in 1996, argued that

the multiculturalist approach overestimates the homogeneity and autonomy of the various ethnic groups and underestimates the degree to which all groups are reciprocally implicated in the creation of cultural forms within a common framework.

(*Meaning of Race* 177)

Malik argues that multiculturalism is flawed for the same reasons that policies of apartheid and segregation were flawed: for re-inscribing difference and for viewing the migrant populations as external to the culture of the nation. Multiculturalism thus becomes the manner in which ‘[t]he national camp puts an end to any sense of cultural development’ (*Between Camps* 84), yet, Gilroy still believes that a ‘meaningful multiculturalism’ is attainable (6). Malik’s representation, in contrast, rejects what he terms *cellular multiculturalism*, a condition whereby communities coexist in an insular fashion, a condition arising from mutual distrust between cosmopolitan

groups. It is only through the recognition of diasporic communities as diverse that commonality can be identified across these groups. In other words, the precarious positions of stateless citizens who are threatened by ‘camp mentalities’ from within their own diaspora threaten the capacity for patterns of migration and settlement to transcend the partiality of cultural communities.

The restraints surrounding both Gabriel/Solomon and Dorothy in their daily negotiation of the hostile space of Weston work to expose the dangerous nature of such insular national communities. In his recent monograph *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law* (2011), David Farrier identifies the use of the camp motif as signifying ‘the embodiment of a condition of unbelonging encoded within the concept of citizenship’ (13). Farrier argues that Phillips represents Weston as a place where ‘issues of place and dignity are mediated . . . by an ambiguity surrounding the distinction between stranger and resident’ (201). However, Weston can also be read as a site of interstice, where Dorothy and Solomon both traverse their positions as “resident” and “stranger” in order to attempt a reconciliation of citizen to non-citizen. Therefore, I argue that Dorothy and Solomon are not represented as ambiguous in their roles within the community – rather, they explicitly challenge those distinctions. In spite of their ultimate failure of communication, their very attempt to converse across cultural boundaries can be read as a re-evaluation of the limits placed on cellular communities within localised spheres.

Stephen Clingman notes that in *A Distant Shore* ‘belonging may be flickering rather than fixed, dependent on ratios of power and recognition, voicing and silence’ (‘England Has Changed’ 47). Phillips’s use of silence to problematise the migrants’ sense of communal belonging can be traced through his previous works, particularly in the novels *Higher Ground* (1989) and *The Nature of Blood* (1997), in which the two female, European, Jewish protagonists find it impossible to vocalise the trauma

of their memories of the Nazi period, and both of whom end up hospitalised in England as a result. *A Distant Shore* moves forward from these explorations of the ‘camp mentality’ of the survivors of the Nazi death camps, to an analysis of England as a ‘new nation’, one complicit with a camp mentality. Dorothy is classified as a citizen through the fundamental claim of nativity, yet she finds herself a stranger to the contemporary life of England, which relegates her to the role of observer or outsider, and eventually, exiles her to the mental institution. Although Solomon, in his position as refugee, is presented as the “other”, he finds himself unable to forge connections between members of his diasporic community and instead identifies individuals within the host community who might offer him refuge and assistance. It is through these connections that a space for mutual community-building becomes available, despite the “silence” surrounding both narratives.

Similarly, the overt racism that Solomon encounters at the hands of the residents of Stoneleigh as the most visible of outsiders mirrors the sense of isolation that Dorothy feels as someone who is “of” England, but “not of” Weston. Despite her fundamental claim to citizenship through nativity, Dorothy is drawn to Solomon as she sees in him a reflection of her own alienation. Bénédicte Ledent and Rezzan Silku have both investigated Phillips’s use of mirroring to draw parallels between individuals who are disadvantaged according to their gender or race. Solomon and Dorothy are shown to ‘share an experience of loneliness, invisibility and exclusion’ that leads to their eventual permanent casting out from society – Solomon by his brutal death, and Dorothy to the stigma of the psychiatric hospital (Ledent, ‘Of, and not of, this Place’ 153). Although previous criticism has focussed on Phillips’s use of Dorothy as a figure who ‘embodies the existential dislocation of a person who is in her own home without feeling at home’ (Bonnici 287), I view this use of mirroring in *A Distant Shore* as representing an investigation of England’s national condition,

rather than the individual moment of crisis. Solomon's stirring of latent racism within the wider national community, and the implied influence of his death on the accelerated decline of Dorothy's mental state, situates him as an interstitial figure who threatens the stability and framework of both the migrant and national communities he occupies a space within.

It is my contention, then, that *A Distant Shore* problematises England's position as a multicultural nation in its exploration of the excluded, exilic positions of both the "traditional", national exile, and that of the socially exiled so-called native citizen. Through their narrative accounts the accepted perceptions of exclusive homogeneity among both the citizen and the diasporic migrant figure are challenged. In his exploration of naming, silence, and domesticity in the novel, Phillips problematises accepted models of community aesthetics. In order to unravel the complexity of the narrative, I will approach my reading of the novel by focussing on key aspects of the text. I will examine Phillips's distrust of both migrant and national communities; this will lead to a discussion of the effect of modes of silencing on selfhood, and to representations of the domestic as portrayed by the figure of Dorothy; which I will demonstrate leads back, finally, to an analysis of England as a "national camp". Ultimately, my analysis exposes Phillips's repudiation of community aesthetics as tensions are exposed not only across migrant and national communities, but also extended to within migrant communities themselves.

Throughout Phillips's narrative England is characterised as a hostile, distant land. Gabriel arrives in England with two travelling companions, clinging to the side of a cargo ship from which they must leap into the waters of the English Channel. Phillips describes the arrival of Gabriel and his fellow illegal immigrant, Bright:

[t]he ship is approaching a coastline that looks like a long, thin black shadow decorated with speckles of white light, and Gabriel blinks repeatedly, for the sea water is burning his eyes. He can see that Bright is gesturing wildly to him, but there is no sign of the other man. Bright now clings on to the metal chain with just one hand, and with the other hand he is pointing to the black water. “Jump!”

(*A Distant Shore* 136)

The image of England’s shoreline is rendered as a distant, sombre place. Far from being the glorious, alabaster sight greeting those seeking refuge and familiar shores, these cliffs are depicted as a menacing shadow, a place of darkness where only pinpricks of light can emerge. Gabriel and Bright endanger their lives for the chance to steal into England undetected, but their third travelling companion is not so lucky, having fallen from the ship’s ledge during their precarious crossing. Rather than the land offering the men light and refuge, they must plunge instead into ‘black water’, and it is Bright who enables their successful crossing, and who assists the injured Gabriel to the shore. For the “illegal”, the “unworthy migrant”, England does not offer the opportunities for light and refuge traditional readings of the white cliffs are accustomed to.

However, in depicting England as a hostile land, Phillips does not present Gabriel with an alternative community in which to participate. Thomas Bonnici has speculated that Phillips’s reluctance to specify Gabriel’s origins allows links to be drawn between his two protagonists. Bonnici argues that ‘for Solomon and Dorothy, the country of birth, an erstwhile solid and stable place, is a mythical space’ (287). Furthermore, by not specifically naming Solomon’s country of origin, Phillips leaves the reader to speculate that his experience could be one of thousands of similar stories

emanating from the contemporary troubles of postcolonial African nations (although we are encouraged to assume he is from an English-speaking former colony). When Gabriel, newly arrived in London, meets his ‘countryman’ Emmanuel,

Gabriel says the name of his country, and suddenly the man is overcome with emotion and he looks as though he is going to cry. He opens both arms wide. ‘My brother, I cannot believe this. I have been here in England for so long and now I am finally with a countryman.’

(173)

In addition to the characteristic evasion of naming in this passage, there is a direct textual refusal to name. The repudiation of Gabriel’s country of origin reflects the consciousness of the refugee, whose very discarding their citizenship in order to claim asylum is in itself a rejection of their natal past. Implicated in war crimes in his own country, in fleeing and seeking refuge, Gabriel displays an ‘unwillingness to identify any more by means of the “cultural” and “national” identity of a nation that effaces the faces of others’ (Arsic 52). Phillips exposes the dangers of Gabriel aligning himself with his national identity, as his ‘countryman’ Emmanuel goes on to steal the last of Gabriel’s money and escapes out of a pub window. The danger of maintaining access to the world which he has left behind are made explicit, and Gabriel leaves London, this time rejecting not only his country but also his own name – changing it to Solomon. If ‘the contemporary concept of the refugee as developed in Europe is founded upon an accompanying and validating narrative’ (Woolley 33), then Solomon’s refusal of that narrative in his rejection of naming becomes problematic to his position within the diasporic community, and compels him to instead forge ties with the previously “inhospitable” host nation.



Dorothy's and Solomon's narratives converge in Weston, where they both attempt to strike out new lives far from the memories of the past. However, memory is not so readily divested and the narrative attempts to grapple with their pasts reflects despite their individual silences reflects this. As noted above, some of Phillips's previous works have linked the narratives of European Jews with that of the racialised subject, comparatively presenting their dual experiences of marginalisation and placement on the periphery of hegemonic society. In *A Distant Shore*, Weston is presented as an aspirational, expanding town where the new-build development of Stoneleigh, and its residents, are viewed with suspicion. Twinned with a 'German town bombed flat by the RAF, and [a] French village [that] used to be full of Jews who were all rounded up and sent to the camps' (4), in this placement of the town within a narrative of invasion, Phillips intimates that post-war England is uncannily proximate to the previously indexed theories of 'the national camp' as a place where dignity and the recognition of humanity is denied to those identified as "non-citizens". In Weston, Dorothy and Solomon both begin to unravel the carefully constructed narratives they have placed protectively around themselves, and so eventually Weston (and by extension England) is exposed as a place not of refuge but of exclusion. The countryside may have escaped the ruin of the blitzkrieg in the 1940s, but in the ensuing years of decline it has struggled to maintain a recognizable social identity, moving away from "country idylls" and towards "new towns". With his location of the narrative in Weston, Phillips moves forward from explorations of "camp mentalities" to an analysis of England as a 'nation of hidden narratives and glancing connections' in which the boundaries between 'insider' and 'outsider' are crossed and re-crossed (Clingman 'England Has Changed' 57). Dorothy opens her narrative, and indeed the novel, with the words 'England has changed' (*Distant Shore* 3), and later Gabriel's first image of the English as a community reveals that 'it would appear that not only

are these people all strangers to one another, but they seem determined to make sure that this situation *will remain unchanged*' (163, emphasis added). In Weston Dorothy and Solomon tentatively begin to explore their changing individual narratives through their parallel positions of exile – in Solomon's case, his legal position as a refugee, and in Dorothy's, her self-imposed aloofness. Rather than the migrant community offering Solomon refuge, it is the flawed attempts at friendship by the English men and women he meets that offer a chance of redemption. His first experience of life amongst other migrants – the unexplained disappearance of his friend Bright, the ignoble death of his cellmate and fellow "illegal" Said, and the theft perpetrated by Emmanuel – betray and isolate him further, so that the diasporic community becomes closed to him. In attempting to reveal Solomon's narrative history through his eventual interactions with Dorothy at Stoneleigh, Phillips's view of English communities, both native and migrant, as places not of community and refuge, but of distrust and myopia, becomes apparent. David Farrier positions Phillips's use of Weston in the novel as 'signifying a limit . . . commensurate with Phillips's sense of the limitations placed on the migrant's participation in the new world order' (202). Yet if, as Farrier argues, Weston only operates 'as a motif of a space where dignity (recognition of humanity) is utterly denied' (202), then we overlook the attempts which Dorothy and Solomon make to forge a connection across the perceived divides of their positions as citizen and non-citizen, and we also fail to recognise Dorothy's position as resident *and* stranger. It is my contention that it is the ability of both Dorothy and Solomon to become interstitial figures within the community which allow for a reading of the text as, albeit glancingly, both hopeful and redemptive, and not exclusively a sombre tale of pervasive exclusion.

In addition to Solomon's relationship with Dorothy, the narrative charts the attempts of other white English females to build a connection with the outcasted

Gabriel. The teenage girl Denise's tentative attempts at friendship, like those of the asylum lawyer, Katherine, and later of Dorothy, fail to protect Gabriel from the hostile environment he has entered. Gabriel, who up to now has relied on his friend Bright as a travelling partner, is initially wary of Denise, as '[i]t is difficult to tell if this girl is typical of all English girls, but . . . he still does not trust her' (185). Yet his initial anger at what he perceives as her disrespectful nature is dissipated when she shares the abuse she has suffered at the hands of her father, and he realises that 'this house that he and Bright have stumbled across is, for this girl, a place of safety' (188). Unable to travel to London due to his injury, and abandoned by Bright, who moves on without him, Gabriel accepts the girl's help in bringing him food and water, but their mutual 'place of safety' is destroyed when they are discovered by Denise's father and Gabriel is arrested. Gabriel's inability to adequately communicate his experiences compounds his difficulty in traversing the unfamiliar system of English law. When asked by Katherine to articulate the case for his asylum – to build his narrative – 'Gabriel hears the question, but his mind blocks it' (114). This 'refusal or inability to reconstruct certain narratives' (Connerton 76) brought on by trauma, can prevent asylum-seekers from legitimising their claims to refuge. Gabriel is able to remember his trauma only through his dreams, his mind working to defend him against the memories when he is in a conscious state. Later, as he attempts to defend himself from allegations around his behaviour with Denise, he tells Katherine 'I did nothing bad. The girl was not unhappy' (189), which is interpreted as an explanation, but not, as it is intended to be, a denial. Although Gabriel is from an English-speaking country, his language at times becomes confused, unable to interpret idiom and in turn being misinterpreted by those trying to assist him. Similarly the dropping of charges related to Denise stems from her silence on the nature of their relationship to each other. If the refugee does indeed represent 'the forms and limits of a coming political

community' (Agamben 4), then Gabriel's inability to effectively communicate with the system of law highlights the dangers of the current system of acknowledgement and representation. Additionally, without recognition of the fundamental 'right to hospitality' codified in international asylum agreements, the 'realisation of a cosmopolitan constitution' by national communities becomes a distant possibility (Kant 139). Consequently, although there are several narrative attempts by Gabriel/Solomon to procure productive relationships, these are conveyed on an individual, and not a community-wide, level.

In this way, Solomon's difficulty in finding a voice from which to share his experiences is shown to emanate not just from his place on the periphery, but also from his status as an asylum seeker, one who is expected to tell his story in order to justify his position outside of the normative boundaries of the law. However Dorothy, the native citizen, also has a narrative which is also marked by silence and a problematic participation with the society around her. Recently divorced, she struggles to maintain her position within society, and this struggle forms in part her reluctance to fully embrace her empathy for Solomon. In particular, the breakdown of Dorothy's marriage to her husband Brian is presented in terms of silence within a domestic, mundane setting. Brian 'hated her to mention his little potbelly, and so she stayed quiet on this subject. Which was generally how they passed through their thirties and their forties with each other. By staying quiet' (196). Through Dorothy's narrative the dangers of silence, of not communicating, are viewed in a much less threatening, but equally insidious manner, to those faced by Solomon. By domesticating the issue of silence, Phillips embeds it into normative, vernacular practices. Dorothy and Brian attempt to ignore their own changing and evolving lives by a self-imposed quietude that they believe will protect them. Instead, it becomes an oppressive force which settles onto Dorothy, who struggles to cope with the changes

that gradually encircle her as the novel progresses. A fracturing occurs, distancing the realities of the domestic sphere from her internal perceptions of that sphere. Dorothy's silence allows her to 'process [her] internal world' (Connerton 68), but as she begins to be further ostracised from the society around her, her narrative obfuscates that internal world, so that neither she or the reader are sure what events have taken place and which are a product of her own mind.

The catalyst for the changes which affect Dorothy and lead to her eventual "exile" in Weston begin with her affair with a married Asian shopkeeper, Mahmood. The silence which has marked her previous relationship is for a time lifted by the presence of her lover. Dorothy presents her interest in Mahmood as "improving" – she sees, in his migrant status, a return to the dignity of English values, and in some way believes that she can "civilise" him further. But as their relationship sours, Dorothy 'understands that he is suppressing laughter' towards her antiquated views of Englishness (198). In a particularly painfully constructed scene, the aging Englishwoman attempts to impose English civility and retain her sense of dignity. Whilst her lover 'eats quickly, often with one hand', Dorothy, in contrast, 'clumsily moves a piece of chicken breast up and onto her fork. He watches closely as she dips the fork into the rice and then dabs the whole construction in a shallow pool of curry sauce before levering it towards her mouth' (198). Mahmood's careful (and almost painful) examination of Dorothy in this scene, observing her like a specimen, points towards a shifting of social positions within England itself. No longer does Mahmood occupy a precarious identity in opposition to Englishness – rather, he feels confident and comfortable in retaining a cosmopolitan mode of being which is both distinct from and influences Englishness. This cosmopolitan embedding is encapsulated by the scene, involving as it does Britain's favourite takeaway food, curry. Dorothy positions herself as the outsider as she struggles to eat, ridiculing herself in her attempt to

approach the task with characteristic English ideas of refined dining. In contrast, it is Mahmood who, eating with his fingers, occupies the space of insider to the cultural exchange. The intimacy of sharing food does not breed connectivity between the two participants – rather, it serves to highlight the distances between them. Mahmood’s confidence allows him to look upon Dorothy’s attempts to bring him into her sphere with some contempt, ‘as though her choice of Chopin had somehow damaged his oriental ear’ (196). No longer is this the migrant who longs to assimilate into English culture, but instead he is aware that English culture has begun to move towards him, so that even if he ‘can never go back home’, England is not quite the hostile environment it once was (198). In contrast, then, to Dorothy’s interactions with Brian or Solomon, Mahmood occupies a space of tension, refusing to be “civilised” by Dorothy’s attempts at refined quietness, and exposing her position as the outsider in opposition to his established, hybrid Englishness.

Eventually Solomon and Dorothy attempt to break the silences in which they are both trapped by resolving to articulate their separate experiences of trauma. Yet Phillips does not allow them this final attempt at forging ties in which their individual memories of trauma can become a shared memory of belonging, as Solomon is killed before either party can put their plans into action. Although Solomon receives help and support from a variety of sources, it is not until he meets Dorothy that he begins to consider sharing the memories he has so far suppressed. As he dresses in front of the mirror, he muses that in Dorothy he has found

a respectable woman. This is a woman to whom I might tell my story. If I do not share my story, then I have only this one year to my life. I am a one-year-old man who walks with heavy steps. I am a man burdened with hidden history. I look in the mirror and straighten my shirt collar and then I adjust

my tie. I leave my bungalow and walk across the neatly trimmed grass towards her house. I knock on her door.

(300)

By referring to himself as a ‘one-year-old man’, Solomon claims a nascent sense of nativity to his newly acquired status in England. Advancing from his original position as a non-citizen occupying an extra-legal space of asylum, Solomon identifies his refugeeism as a site of rebirth, calling into question the idea of citizenship as indelibly linked to the place of one’s natural birth. The ‘neatly trimmed grass’ of Weston (for which Solomon is responsible), contrasts starkly with the confusion and unrest of his time in Africa and France. Solomon believes he will be unburdened once he has divested himself of his memories, allowing him to become an established member of the community. However, this monologue appears at the end of the fourth narrative section of the novel, after the reader has already learned of Solomon’s death at the hands of a racist gang. In fact, the only remaining narrative is that of Dorothy’s decayed mind, following her committal to hospital. Solomon performs his last act of dignity, of straightening and adjusting the image of himself in the mirror, as he prepares to expose himself, as Gabriel, to his only friend. But the reader already knows that Solomon will die a man still ‘burdened with hidden history’, a man whose only narrative is that which has been written for him, the narrative of his asylum claim. As such the narrative falters in its attempt to develop conversations across subjectivity.

By allowing the reader, and not Dorothy, access to the memories of Gabriel, Phillips gives voice to the memory which Gabriel-as-Solomon, in his mute exile, attempts to escape. Solomon’s shame hinders the articulation of his memory, and therefore Phillips leaves the reader to decipher and judge the actions of Gabriel in

Africa. Paul Connerton, in his work on shame, has theorised that when a history is deemed as shameful, it becomes erased from the collective memory, amid ‘the refusal to reconstruct certain narratives’ which leaves ‘terminological silences’ (76). Phillips’s narrative, in recursively disallowing Solomon’s affirmation of his traumatic memories, stymies the opening of a meaningful discourse. Solomon and Dorothy share their experiences only through the narrative form of the novel, and not explicitly with each other, as each end the novel in silence. In addition to the silencing of Solomon through the violent narrative rupture of his death, Phillips indicates this shared experience of silence as Dorothy, confined to the mental institution, recognises that ‘this is not my home, and until they accept this, then I will be as purposefully silent as a bird in flight’ (312). In using the image of the bird in flight, Phillips connects the freeing of Dorothy’s mind to the condition of the diasporic migrant – a figure of movement, never fully at home. Although Solomon’s final attempt at meaningful discourse with Dorothy is thwarted, it is through their relationship that their narratives are ultimately revealed to the reader.

In conclusion, although multiple critics have read *A Distant Shore* as a pessimistic and sombre view of national community, the form of Phillips’s novel opens up a space on a meta-narratological level for communication across the boundaries of cellular communities.<sup>11</sup> To return to Gilroy’s depiction of the “national

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<sup>11</sup> In the Bénédicte Ledente and Daria Tunca’s edited collection *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life* (Rodopi: 2012), every article included on *A Distant Shore* makes reference to the bleakness of the text. Thomas Bonnici’s essay ‘Negotiating Inclusion in Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore*’ argues that ‘the outcome in Phillips’s novel is, on the whole, bleak’ (290); Alessandra Di Maio posits that ‘trauma is omnipresent in [*A Distant Shore*]’ (‘A New World Tribe in Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore*’ 261); Sandra Courtman’s essay ‘Dorothy’s Heart of Darkness: How Europe meets Africa in *A Distant Shore*’ diagnoses ‘the Britain and Africa depicted in *A Distant Shore* [as] profoundly unhealthy societies’ (275), and characterises Dorothy and Gabriel as ‘intensely lonely people in ailing societies’ (279); and, finally, Petra Tournay-Theodotou argues that ‘the novel provides a bleakly powerful commentary on the nation’s condition’ (‘Strange Encounters: Nationhood and the Stranger in Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore*’ 306).



camp”, the narrative renders England as a place where exceptional states of belonging are portrayed as the normative mode of social interaction, positing the breaking down of encamped mentalities as required on both an individual and national level. In this way Phillips expresses a faith in the capacity for the individual to transcend problematic discourses of homogeneity which lead to exclusionary modes of thinking across difference. However, as discussed previously, the characters’ ultimate inability to communicate across boundaries of difference problematizes the capacity of the national space to allow transcultural communication and exchange. Nevertheless, through the connection of the migrant exile with the exiled native citizen, *A Distant Shore* positions the global effect of political migration into a localised setting which challenges established notions of both diasporic and nationalist forms of English community, and leading to a problematic yet hopeful expression of a specifically English subjectivity which is not bound by race or ethnicity.

Before I pursue a reading of Phillips’s 2009 novel *In the Falling Snow*, it is apposite to chart some of the connective thematics of the two novels. In addition to the previously mentioned phenomenon of Phillips’s narrative locales shifting in the first decade of the twenty-first century from the diasporic black Atlantic to England’s terra firma, the novels can be seen to explore ideological shifts in the wake of post-terror nationalism in Europe and the United States. If, indeed, cultural production in the wake of the USA and allies’ (including British) involvement in the so-called War on Terror ‘entails a tightening of identifications intended to align people ideologically based on appeals to a manufactured sense of cultural nativity’ (Cilano 19), Phillips’s novels *A Distant Shore* and *In the Falling Snow* can be read as subtle but penetrating critiques of constructed cultural nativity and how such constructions can lead to crises of belonging in the context of contemporary England. Both novels contemplate multiculturalism in an environment pointedly changed, if not entirely distant, from its

twentieth-century manifestations. I have already discussed the ways in which *A Distant Shore* explores contemporary trauma and migrancy fuelled by global conflicts, rather than the postcolonial movement of the past. Similarly, *In the Falling Snow* deals with questions of English subjectivity that have arisen both in the wake of the dual terrorist attacks on New York and London in 2001 and 2005, and also in response to wider European immigration into England. At one level, the setting of Phillips's novel mostly in contemporary London enables a critique of the state-sponsored "manufacturing" of social cohesion as a form of neo-colonialism which elides the cultural heritage of the black diaspora.<sup>12</sup> In a wider sense, Phillips's critique of the contemporary efforts to build cohesive communities attempts to historicise twenty-first century "Englishness" through the expression of a multidirectional consciousness that is pitted against the securing of national selfhood seen as embattled by the threat of foreigners 'at home'.<sup>13</sup>

In the years following the terror attacks on the USA in 2001, Phillips has written and commented extensively on witnessing the moment the second hijacked plane hit the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and on the newly 'fearful society [. . .] a climate which is legitimizing the vulgar rush to nationalism' of the immediate post-9/11 period ('Give me your tired' 38). Phillips, who is now a citizen of the United States, has, in his non-fiction, critiqued the US government anti-terror policies as giving rise to 'narratives of belonging and betrayal' ('Give me your tired' 53) amongst its migrant population. In 2011 he delivered the first of BBC Radio 4's

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<sup>12</sup> Here I use the term neo-colonialism not as definitively economic but in the broader sense of the 'continuation of Western colonialism by non-traditional means' (Prasad 6).

<sup>13</sup> The Parekh Report, commissioned by the Blair government, emphasised the need for society to be 'cohesive as well as respectful of diversity, and [we] must find ways of nurturing diversity while fostering a common sense of belonging and a shared identity' (Parekh ix).

‘Book of the Week’ programmes, *The 9/11 Letters*, as part of their 10-year anniversary commemorations. In a piece entitled ‘Resident Alien’, which took the form of an imagined letter to his nephew, Phillips looks back on the events of 9/11 as a historical marker both in the global narrative and in his personal history. He tells his nephew that ‘the trauma of the previous forty-eight hours had eroded the distance that separates participation from belonging’, and presents the moment of the terror attack as the moment he felt he truly became a “citizen” of his adopted home, America (‘Resident Alien’ np). His personal implication in a key moment in contemporary history fortifies his commitment to recording and telling those narratives of home and belonging that might contest the dominant discourse. He insists that ‘history is not a dull subject . . . it’s a vital, contested narrative peopled with witnesses to events that touch both head and heart’ and that ‘not remembering is indeed the beginning of madness, individually and collectively’ (‘Resident Alien’ np). Phillips urges his nephew, and indeed his listeners, always to remember, not least because life after 9/11 in one respect has engendered the violation of memory. Nationalist discourses have turned ever more stridently to manufacturing a sense of native belonging that dangerously forgets the multidirectional histories that always characterise metropolitan life, and this is true in England as well as in the USA, as communities negotiate the aftermath of the British involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

In England, the ability to broadly measure the relative “success” of multiculturalism was complicated in the early 2000s by the terror attacks in New York and London, not least because ‘attitudes towards race and ethnicity are profoundly influenced by larger geopolitical threats’ (Kymlica 117).<sup>14</sup> Will Kymlica asserts that

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<sup>14</sup> Although there are many differing views of the aims of multiculturalism, I take as my guide Will Kymlica’s theory that a multicultural state must meet 3 essential criteria: 1. ‘the state must be seen as belonging equally to all citizens’; 2. the state must ‘repudiate any nation-building policies that

public support for multiculturalism has waned due to the ‘geopolitical threat’ perceived in relation to Muslim immigrants (125). However I argue that the fault lines underpinning multiculturalism can be seen to stretch back much further than the current geopolitical climate. There has been an ongoing mistrust of migrant and non-dominant populations that goes beyond dominant racial divides between ethnic or nationalist groups, as highlighted by the work of Kenan Malik. Malik claimed in his 1996 work *The Meaning of Race* that ‘the multicultural approach sees immigrant communities as somehow external to the nation’ resulting in the fossilisation of old habits and lifestyles being read as a positive outcome of multiculturalism, rather than ‘the negative product of racism or discrimination’ (177). Thirteen years later, in his book *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009), he charts how the externalisation of migrant communities in the 1980s and 1990s and ‘the segregation of immigrants [not just] through poverty or racism [but also] through the cultural distinctiveness of communities . . . over time mutated into a celebration of cultural separation’ (54). As this separation became fully realised, it led, in the Guyanese novelist David Dabydeen’s words, to ‘little cross-fertilization of cultures taking place’ in the urban English environment (Dabydeen 104). I argue that Phillips critiques the legitimacy of this *cellular* approach to multiculturalism via the individual, cross-cultural narrative gestures of *A Distant Shore* and *In the Falling Snow*. If contemporary communities are failing to break out of exclusionary modes of being, Phillips provides an alternative by the narrative attempts of Dorothy, Solomon, and Keith to communicate beyond their primary cultural memberships.

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assimilate or exclude members of minority or non-dominant groups’; and 3. the state ‘acknowledges the historic injustice done [to its minority or non-dominant groups] and manifests a willingness to offer . . . remedy or rectification’ (65-66)

If the cultural separation which became enshrined in official multiculturalist policy was then thrown into crisis by several events, including the race riots in the North of England in 2001 and the “home-grown” terror attack perpetrated by British Muslims on the London transport system in 2005, the political and communal responses to these events achieved little in the way of bridging the gap as ‘a language of culture and values almost completely supplanted one of race, but the effects of such a language, couched though it often is in relativist terms, produces racial dividends: division, hierarchy, exclusion’ (Lentin & Titley 62). This division and hierarchy of community relations are themes that the narrative of *A Distant Shore* begins to address through the problematical relationship of Dorothy to Mahmood and also to Solomon/Gabriel.

With *In the Falling Snow* – the next of Phillips’s fictions to be set in England – the narrative explicitly deals with the contemporary crisis of multiculturalism in an urban setting, through the figure of Keith, whose work is centred around diversity in his local London borough council. Keith’s status as a British-born black man who has benefitted from state multicultural structures is thrown into relief by his problematic dealings with his white English ex-wife, mixed-race ex-girlfriend, and the Eastern European woman he pursues half-heartedly. In doing so the narrative exposes the hypocrisies of division, hierarchy, and exclusion, and the ways in which contemporary black life in England has moved forward from the tropes of dislocation and is now embedded in the hierarchies of national exclusion. As the contemporary English ‘respect for diversity has become conditional on a new duty to integrate at the level of shared values’ (McGhee 3), Phillips’s novels explore the demonisation of alternative loyalties and how this applies not only to the outcast racial or religious identity but also to select white Europeans (i.e. migrant workers) who threaten the latest narrow and exclusionary notion of “Englishness”. As such Phillips’s novel can

be read as engaging with Michael Keith's argument that 'whilst globalisation promotes multicultural diversity, multicultural diversity brings with it a debate about the contesting of the social and political settlement of the city' (Keith 4). Danuta and Rolf, who are politically excluded from British life by way of their Polish citizenship, coupled with the social exclusion of being immigrants with poor language skills, are evidence of a new kind of contestation of diversity, one which eschews racial divides for cultural ones. In his dealings with the pair, Keith fails to recognise his own complicity in exclusionary modes of community-building, and this failure, combined with his inability to recognize his son Laurie's experience of England as different from his own, problematizes multiculturalism's ability to account for the range of experience in contemporary English communities. In the reading of *In the Falling Snow* to follow, I will engage with the multi-directional nature of these communities and hypothesise a redemptive narrative consciousness at work in the novel.

Abigail Ward writes of Caryl Phillips's 2009 novel *In the Falling Snow* that it 'thinks "transnationally" about identity for black diasporan subjects' ('Across the Atlantic' 297). Whilst Ward's perceptive reading chooses to highlight this 'lasting relationship' through the novel's engagement with African American music and 'intertextual relationship with works by Richard Wright' (297), I begin with the proposition that the transnational contexts of *In the Falling Snow* are not limited to the peripatetic connections of the black diaspora, but also foreground conceptual links to Europe through the trajectories of both the black English and Eastern European characters in the novel. I argue that *In the Falling Snow* contemplates transnational belonging as it deals with questions of English subjectivity that have arisen in response to political changes in the European Union which have empowered more Eastern European migrants to live and work across the United Kingdom. As is well discussed, Phillips's writing about the "Atlantic triangle" of the African diaspora, and

its implications on ideas of home and identity for the migrant have been familiar concerns in his fiction.<sup>15</sup> But in my reading of *In the Falling Snow*, I argue that he expands his engagement with particularly European modes of belonging in critically unfamiliar and even vitally post-racial ways. The location of the novel is unusual in that the narrative takes place exclusively within the boundaries of England (it is the first of Phillips's novels to be confined to England's terra firma). I will argue that Phillips's focus on England, together with the inclusion of Eastern European migrants in the narrative, moves on from the polarisation of race and into a reading of Englishness which is distrustful of migrant groups irrespective of colour. In so doing, *In the Falling Snow* seeks to reclaim a sense of perspective, historicity and memory as it delineates contemporary English life within a wider set of subterranean shifts indexed in the novel.

It is pertinent, here, to establish what I mean by the particularisation of England and Europe in my analysis of the text. John McLeod, writing on the theme of Englishness, has argued that 'the common slippage between Englishness and Britishness seems increasingly unsafe at the turn of a new century' ('Measuring Englishness' 3). As 'Englishness is increasingly approached through a second-generation diaspora sensibility' ('Measuring Englishness' 4), it is perhaps unwise not to acknowledge that authors such as Phillips approach their construction of belonging from a particularly English frame. McLeod points out that *A Distant Shore* opens with the line 'England has changed' (*A Distant Shore* 3), and writes that, for Phillips as well as others, 'the revision of Englishness becomes a subversive, empowering and perhaps even democratising act' ('Measuring Englishness' 6). This revision allows

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<sup>15</sup> The notion of the "triangulation" of the black Atlantic arises from Paul Gilroy's examination of 'transcultural reconceptualisation' (17) in his work *The Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity*.

for a construction of Englishness which celebrates transnational influence within, rather than external to, English belonging.

Expanding this theoretical stance across the European trajectories of the narrative, I turn to the work of Étienne Balibar to place the novel within a transnational European frame. Considering the possibility of the formation of a European transnational citizenship, Balibar argues that ‘what is at stake here is the definition of the *modes of inclusion and exclusion* in the European sphere’ (3, emphasis in orig.). He goes on to critique Europe as historically ‘multiple’, ‘always home to tensions between numerous religious, cultural, linguistic, and political affiliations, numerous readings of history, numerous modes of relations with the rest of the world’ (5). In this reading of Europe as always multiple, Balibar recasts Europe as able to accommodate and reflect its multi-ethnic communities. In advocating for a transnational citizenship informed by cosmopolitan discourse and facilitated by the European Union, he reconstitutes the place of race within formulations of the European. It is this reconstitution, and the resulting recognition of European transnational influence upon the diasporic subject, which I would like to highlight in my reading of the novel.

In order to explore the effect of European transnationalism on contemporary expressions of Englishness, and how Phillips’s novel addresses these issues, I will conceptualise the text by turning to Michael Rothberg’s work on ‘multidirectional memory’. Rothberg, in writing about trauma studies, has argued that rather than a struggle for an individualised recognition which “whitewashes” and obscures other histories, memorialisation can therefore become a site for the articulation of other, comparative histories which have likewise shaped global identities. It is through these articulations that a collective, but not, in Rothberg’s terms, competitive, memory is expressed. In Rothberg’s attempt to ‘rethink the conceptualization of collective



memory in multicultural and transnational contexts' (*Memory* 21), he links together the experiences of disparate minority migrant peoples – specifically linking Holocaust memory with the memory of decolonisation struggles – to formulate a multidirectionality which lays the foundation for further connections between cosmopolitan minority groups. I intend to expand upon Rothberg's intersection of Holocaust memory with colonial memory to demonstrate *In the Falling Snow's* conceptual intersection of English belonging with European migrancy. In so doing, I will explore how individual experiences of trauma and prejudice are shared by members of disparate minority communities in dialogue with one another – becoming not a memory of a shared event, but part of the shared narrative of their community as a whole. I propose that applying Rothberg's notion of 'multidirectional memory' to the text is a useful way of contextualising my approach to the novel.

Writing about Phillips's earlier novel *The Nature of Blood* (1997), Rothberg argues that the author often 'bear[s] witness to the difficult task of breaking out of taken-for-granted frameworks of historical and cultural understanding' (*Memory* 172). In applying Rothberg's theory to *In the Falling Snow*, I uncover an evolutionary link between Phillips's portrayal of the novel's Eastern European migrant characters and his Jewish characters in *The Nature of Blood*. In so doing, I hope to show that the black diasporan selfhood conveyed to the reader through Phillips's work implicates not only a connection across British and African histories, but also hypothesises trajectories of travel towards a European belonging. Rothberg posits that the interaction of historical memories between different members of a single society results in a 'multidirectional memory' which performs as the 'illustrat[ion] of a productive, intercultural dynamic' between members of that society (*Memory* 3). Rothberg's use of Phillips's novels, in particular *The Nature of Blood*, to demonstrate the cultural interpolations of multidirectional communities expands the reach of

transcultural exchange and memory. He challenges collective memory as the building block of social consciousness, suggesting instead that

the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pre-given, limited space . . . In contrast, pursuing memory's multidirectionality encourages . . . [groups to] actually come into being through their ideological interactions with others: both the subjects and space of the public are open to continual reconstruction.

(*Memory 5*)

Rothberg rejects 'the conception of competitive memory [as] the notion that the boundaries of memory parallel the boundaries of group identity' (5), and reminds us that that 'the borders of memory and identity are jagged' (5). The exclusivity of 'collective memory' yearned for by individual groups always seeks to conceal the dynamic, fluid interaction that perpetually happens across cultures and heritages. Yet memory, however fluid, is never complete. I argue that *In the Falling Snow* a multidirectional focus opens a space for refusing closed, limited interpretations of what it means to participate in an "English" way of life. Rather than migrant communities looking only to their discrete immigrant heritage or subscribing to a 'whitewashed'<sup>16</sup> version of becoming English, multidirectional thinking enables a vibrant, circuitous pathway through the competing influences on the cultural identity

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<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Paul's polemical *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* asserted that the English government institutionalised racism and pressured immigrants into a sub-citizenship that did not allow them to fully integrate into English society in the years following the Second World War.

of the citizenry.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, Phillips's depiction of successive black English generations is marked by their silences and absences, rather than a continual ebb and flow of interaction and articulation. As I will explain, Phillips's use of a recursive narrative form and of "mirroring memories" takes on Rothberg's 'supple logic' of the multidirectional as a reformulation of contemporary English multiculturalism. In doing so, Phillips allows the form of the novel to articulate what his flawed characters often cannot: fascinatingly, while the novel seeks multidirectionality, his characters often do not. As I will investigate through my reading, the relationships which Keith strives to maintain are stymied by the failure of communication and understanding between and across cultural lines. The use of the novel's structure to suggest a multidirectionality that is simultaneously not lived through the narrative allows Phillips to highlight the need for such a lived reality. Ironically, Phillips stresses the need for responsible remembering – contemporary history as a contested multidirectional narration *that requires perpetual witness* – by depicting his major characters struggling to pay adequate attention to the lives and histories of others.

In the novel the concerns of the 'Sons of Empire', and the struggles of their own children to re-inscribe England are therefore taken beyond the at-times restrictive language of race (*Falling Snow* 196). *In the Falling Snow* contends with the vexed policy of multiculturalism by exposing the mirroring between older Commonwealth and newer Eastern European experiences of otherness, and in doing so it re-imagines the English multicultural landscape in the wider context of racial re-inscription. This re-inscription does not yet signal an end to dominant hegemony and hierarchy based

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<sup>17</sup> Rey Chow has argued in her text *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that multiculturalism is 'fraught with unresolved tensions' (134) relating to racism and class discrimination; in spite of this I would argue that multiculturalism remains a vital conduit for the discussion and expression of difference and belonging in the modern nation-state, in part due to these very tensions.

on residual notions of race, but instead splices old racisms with a new antipathy for white foreigners. In so doing, Phillips explores the contemporary condition of English multiculturalism. Kenan Malik has argued that politically recognised diversity has led to migrant communities developing a view of themselves as ‘semi-detached Britons’ (*Fatwa to Jihad* 130). Rather than multiculturalism emerging as an organic expression of cultural difference, Malik contends that the policy was ‘imposed from the top, part of a government strategy to defuse the anger created by racism’ (*Fatwa to Jihad* 41). This has resulted in communities living alongside one another, but not interacting inclusively together. According to Malik, multiculturalism has ‘helped create new divisions and more intractable conflicts which made for a less openly racist but a more insidiously tribal Britain’ (*Fatwa to Jihad* 63), as it has reinforced communities of difference rather than communities of inclusion. It is my contention that *In the Falling Snow* indexes this vexed relationship with contemporary multiculturalism. The text does not, however, deliver a wholly ‘bleak’ rendering of contemporary life, a charge often levelled at Phillips’s writing. Rather, in his characters’ individual acts of conversation and connection he also gestures towards an (imperfect) post-racial conception of society. By using Rothberg’s conception of multidirectional memory as a way of framing Phillips’s text, I intend to delineate the deeply rooted interconnectivity between England and its migrant communities.

Indeed, for much of the novel Phillips’s protagonist, Keith, is complicit in the kinds of state-sponsored multiculturalism that poorly manages community relations and refuses to admit the quotidian realities of contemporary English life. The silences and absences that ‘not remembering’ can create are exemplified by Keith, who heads the newly amalgamated Department of Race Equality, Disability & Women’s Affairs at his local authority. His personal life, marked by strained relationships and lack of communication with his father, ex-wife and mixed-race son, is at odds with the kind

of community-based transcultural communication that his work requires. As Keith's professional and personal life begins to unravel, he finds himself pulled into relationships with two young women: Yvette, a mixed-race employee with whom he engages in a short but devastating affair, and Danuta, a Polish migrant worker whom he is interested in sexually but for whom he never develops anything further than a distracting obsession. The recursive narrative of the novel swings back and forth from the present day to incidents in Keith's childhood with his parents and stepparents, through the courtship with his white English wife, Annabelle, and into the events which eventually lead to the breakdown of his marriage and enforced absence from his work. The narrative culminates with the death of his father and Keith's reconciliation with his family, although the extent of that reconciliation remains ambiguous. By examining Keith's attempts to come to terms with the "changed face" of contemporary English multiculturalism and his shifting place within it, his interactions with the younger generations (both the younger women he attempts to seduce, and his own son) expose the extent to which he fails to understand the ways in which mixed communities negotiate their shared spaces.

Despite his position within the state and cultural structure, Keith is depicted as disconnected from the wider community and experiencing difficulty in engaging with racial questions in his everyday personal interactions. When his ex-wife Annabelle raises concerns that she 'might be losing [their son Laurie] around the black-white thing' he finds himself impotent to allay her fears and take control of their family situation (118). He also fails to understand her concern that his immersion in "black" culture will lead to an implicit rejection of his "whiteness", and therefore a rejection of her. Both parents are characterised as lacking the multidirectional tools to be able to deny the reification of race, and acknowledge their son's multiple racial belonging. Unable to reassure Annabelle that their teenage son is not falling prey to

inner-city racial pressures, the scene concludes with Annabelle searching alone for a missing Laurie, eventually finding him before Keith can come to her aid. Keith, who has just attempted to assert his parental authority by reassuring Annabelle that he is on his way to see them both, has this assertion rejected by his ex-wife, who cuts short their conversation in her relief at locating Laurie. Keith is left alone, holding the telephone receiver, as ‘the line goes dead, but he continues to hold the mobile to his ear. As long as he holds this pose there is still some communication between himself and Annabelle and their son. He just has to hold the pose’ (120). This is a revealing moment in the text, as Keith’s effort to maintain a dialogue with his family is portrayed in the performative, quasi-comical fashion of holding ‘the pose’ as the line of communication literally ‘goes dead’. It captures the general failure of communication between people at large in the novel, the absence of contact and contestation vital to the realisation of a meaningful multiculturalism which allows transcultural engagement and understanding. Through his voluntary displacement from the family through his infidelity, Keith has shut down the dialogue with his wife and child. The silences depicted within the novel are vast. The explicit telephonic silence between Keith and Annabelle in this scene extends figuratively through the narrative between father, son, and grandson.

Keith’s relationship with his father Earl illustrates this disruption of a linear genealogy of black Britishness. Earl’s battle with mental illness leads him to leave his son in the care of his white English stepmother, Brenda. Following Keith’s move south for university, the two men maintain a physical as well as an emotional distance. Despite this rupture between the two, Keith travels to see his father on his deathbed, and Earl finally opens up about his early experiences of migrant life. As a product of the colonial education system, Earl is encouraged to seek opportunity abroad after the

death of his parents, but upon his arrival is surprised by both the poverty and the ignorance of the hostile English public that he encounters as he recalls

whatever question they care to test you on you have England under control, but the truth is most of these people don't know a blasted thing about themselves so every question pointing at you but if you want to shame them you just turn it around and ask them about themselves and their own history and you soon going see how quickly they stop talking. Mark you, the one thing they all know is they don't care much for the foreigner and that is you, man, that is always you, but don't call them prejudice because that will vex them . . . What you must do is play the stranger because it make them feel better.

(271)

It is clear that Earl has internalised the wish to 'play the stranger' that he believes the hegemonic white society expects of him. His early disappointment at the racism he and his friends encounter leads to a disassociation with Englishness. Earl believes that in spite of everything that he has accomplished, his son can never be more than a foreigner in his homeland, as everything comes down to his race, rather than his birth or citizenship. But Keith and his generation are no longer the strangers interloping the cultural life of England. They are the ones who manage it, as exemplified in Keith's work at the local authority. Keith's experience of England directly refutes his father's clinging to past experiences of racism and breaks an exclusively genealogical narrative of Keith as 'second-generation'. He has other connections and relationships that take him beyond Earl's horizon of understanding. Although the communication between the two men is empowering to Keith, it crucially does not, ultimately, bind

the two men together in a collective memory but rather serves to disestablish their common ties through the difference of their lived experience.

This genealogical rupture is again illustrated by a memory which occurs very late in the novel. Keith is living with his English stepmother, Brenda, who has retained custody following Earl's institutionalisation. Living once more in the community, Earl has taken Keith out for the day. Dropping his son off with Brenda after the rare visit, Earl leaves again through a snowstorm, and Keith watches as his father

gingerly picked his way down the path in search of some form of transportation that might convey the snow-furred pilgrim back to wherever he lived. As he walked, his father left behind a single set of footprints, and he remembered lingering by the doorstep and watching closely as the falling snow steadily erased all evidence of his father's presence.

(321)

As his father's 'single set of footprints' are erased by the northern snowfall, Keith is left without protector or progenitor and his genealogical ties to the 'imaginary homeland' of the West Indies are figuratively erased. This conceptual, if not literal, erasure of the evidence of his migrant heritage allows Keith the opportunity to develop an English identity of which his racial heritage is a part, but which also allows him access to the privileges of Englishness. In problematizing the reading of Keith as emblematically black British, Phillips highlights the contemporary position of black people in England, who are invested in a multidirectional range of historical relations that point not only westward to the Caribbean but eastwards, across the North Sea and the English Channel, to mainland Europe.



The novel also charts Keith's unsuccessful attempt to connect meaningfully with the 'third-generation', his son Laurie. Keith repeatedly fails to impress his opinions on race and belonging to his own son. Turning to Bénédicte Ledent's recent work on the novel, we can see that in 'examining the lives and the degrees of belonging' of Earl, Keith, and Laurie,

the novel encourages us not only to observe and assess the possible divergences between them but also warns us about the potential danger of regarding them as completely distinct from each other, and therefore as unbridgeable.

(‘Mind the Gaps’ 165)

Ledent positions the cross-generational scope of the novel, identifying the complex ‘gaps’ which are a central concern of *In the Falling Snow*, and that break an exclusively genealogical narrative of Keith as ‘second generation’. Keith has benefitted in his personal and professional life from the rise of multicultural social policy in England, but in parallel with his ascendancy within English political and class structures comes his struggle to reconstitute his relationship with his son. Laurie, whose cultural influences include American hip hop music and the Barcelona football team, rejects his father in the wake of an acrimonious marital separation. Despite Keith's disconnection from his own father's sites of belonging, he fails to identify the corresponding disconnections between himself and Laurie. Rather than accepting their differing interpretations of Englishness as indicative of a multidirectional construction of being, Keith indulges in a combative relationship towards his son. Frequently expressing frustration at Laurie's perceived indifference to his Caribbean heritage, a crucial scene between the pair occurs at the midpoint of the novel, when

the two men ascend the London Eye. This symbol of millennial London prompts Keith to deliver an impromptu ‘history lecture’, cut short as he realises that ‘[it is] a veiled attempt to persuade Laurie that this is his city too. And then it occurs to him that it’s possible his son already knows this, and that there is no reason for him to acquaint Laurie *with what he already possesses* (163, emphasis added). This critical narrative moment highlights Keith’s bewilderment at the experiential differences between his own conception of ‘homeliness’ and that of his mixed-race son. Laurie possesses London as ‘home’, while Keith still echoes the displacement which is a legacy of his own father’s distrust of England. At the same time, Laurie’s bewilderment at Keith’s attempts to locate him as an outsider in a community in which he feels at home leads to a hesitant relationship with his father, as they fail to build common ground on which to connect. However, the location of this moment of stifled dialogue miles above the city on the London Eye is an example of the narrative accomplishing what Phillips’ flawed protagonist cannot – the ability to overcome the divergences which Ledent identifies. Unlike Ledent, I read these ‘conceptual bridges’ of the narrative (of which the London Eye, allowing an expansive view of the Thames, is one) as tentative instances of communication which signal towards the ability of the individual to build a multidirectional identity. After all, Keith and Laurie are looking out over one of the most transnational localities in the world, the City of London. This functions as a counterpoint to Keith’s struggle to engage with the entangled cultural nature of contemporary English life, and is at the core of the multidirectionality the novel gestures towards.

Significantly, the silences and disconnections which have characterised Keith’s relationship to his black British genealogy also mark the other key axis of the novel’s transcultural relations: Keith’s encounters with Eastern European migrants. Phillips locates Keith in direct conflict with the othering of white European migrant

workers, whom it is clear as the novel progresses are the newest migrant group to be disillusioned and rejected within England's shores. In problematizing Keith in this way, Phillips highlights the tensions between successive migrant groups. Keith is complicit in this othering, as he repeatedly places Danuta under a self-serving, sexualised gaze. However, rather than acquiescing to Keith's marginalising regard, Danuta is characterised as rejecting his exploitative advances. In addition, her status is further complicated by being equally manipulative of her own precarious situation. After living briefly with her fellow migrant worker Rolf, she steals from him and disappears. In this way she is shown to have the ability to use her own marginalisation to her advantage, as well as to victimise others. In the England of *In the Falling Snow*, relationships are complex and conflicting, rather than being easily delineated between those who belong and those who are outsiders. Exposing this complexity, Rolf complains to Keith,

why should the English police care what one foreigner does to another foreigner? . . . I will tell you the truth, English attitudes disappoint me. Do you know what it is like to stand in a shop with money in your pocket and discover that nobody wants to serve you? Telling you with their eyes before you are even asking for anything. Do you know what this is like or how it feels? . . . Can you imagine this?

(210)

The irony of Rolf's helpless question is that Keith is in a particularly empathetic standpoint and should be able to understand Rolf's position. However, he refuses to acknowledge the positionality that might open a historical connection between the two men. Despite the memories and echoes of racism with which Phillips's narrative is

peppered, Keith refuses to recognise the points of connection between himself and these recent migrants. Rolf and Danuta both characterise Keith as being firmly rooted in “Englishness”, allowing him to exert power over them and exposing the inherent difficulties in building a transnational European worldview. This problematises the figure of Keith by placing him in tense relation to Eastern European economic migrants, and can be further evidenced with reference to the narrative.

From his position within the local governance of prescribed modes of community engagement, Keith’s gaze is seen to be one not just of observation, but of complicity with nationally-inflected ideals of Englishness. On seeing Danuta and Rolf leaving their language college without sufficient clothing for the rain, he comments that

somebody should tell these foreigners that it is always raining in England, and that they should buy an umbrella before they even think about a travel pass, or cheap jeans, or a copy of *Time Out*. After all, an umbrella is a key part of the English uniform. . . . And then he sees [Danuta] talking to a tall blond boy who is Germanic in appearance, but he could also be from anywhere in Scandinavia, or from one of the former Soviet countries.

(90-91)

Keith’s use of casual remarks such as ‘these foreigners’ and ‘he could also be from anywhere’ echoes the old racist taunts used against Commonwealth migrants, but he does not recognise the racism implicit in his statements. Danuta’s inexperience with the English language puts her at a perceived disadvantage to Keith. He becomes proprietorial towards her on their first meeting – when she goes to leave for work, he thinks ‘you’ve just had a free conversation class. Perhaps you can skip work tonight

and keep me company' (76). As well as displaying a casual misogyny, Keith's attitude is apathetic towards Danuta. She is little more than a distraction, someone he can display power over due to her social inferiority to him. Through Phillips's representation of Keith's relationship with Danuta the extent of Keith's incapacity to engage in acts of multidirectional memory becomes clear. Accordingly Keith's implication in the cultural hegemony of England as English-born is articulated through these interactions. Despite Danuta and Rolf's "whiteness" they are shown to have more in common with Commonwealth migrant groups than other, wealthier Europeans, and Keith's failure to recognise this is his inability to participate multidirectionally across England's histories of evolving multicultural contact.

Despite the problematical rendering of Keith's relationship to the Eastern Europeans, Phillips uses the narrative form of the novel to reposition Danuta and Rolf not as foreigners but as part of multidirectional constituency by mirroring the experience of current European labour migrants with the experience of post-war Commonwealth migrant. In other words, through the use of the novel's formal narrative, Phillips seeks to expose what Keith fails to see. In illustrating the deprivations of English life experienced and recounted by both Rolf and Earl, their initial impressions of the metropole are exposed as representative of each other, despite being decades apart. Rolf's account is described first, as he 'get[s] a room. A room with a divan, and I wash, cook, eat in this one room, but this is not civilised even if it is how the English do it. Then I must get a second job as a cleaner to pay for the stinking room' (209). Rolf is clearly disgusted by the deprivation and economic hardship he encounters in London. Earl's description of his first night in England comes later in the narrative, although chronologically first, and echoes (or foresees) Rolf's disillusionment. Earl recalls that he 'follow[ed] [my friend] into the attic room . . . Having turn on the bulb the man fall down on a single bed and point to a mattress

on the floor . . . an empty bedpan in the middle of the room, and I surprised to find my friend living like this' (293). Both men are shocked by the realities of English domesticity, which had been regarded as modern and relatively opulent in their home countries. Whilst Earl is disillusioned and surprised, Rolf expresses a more succinct outrage at the living conditions he is expected to adapt to, and even be grateful for. This device of a diversity of characters mirroring each other's experiences across the decades (relayed in deliberate chronological disorder) is utilised to great effect in *In the Falling Snow*. The lack of chronology in the text focuses attention on the ways in which cultural memories echo, but also go unheard. The reader is drawn first to the contemporary moment of distrust of economic migrants travelling from the European Union. It is only after the subsequent parallels to the experience of Earl that a multidirectional consciousness, an acknowledgement that the two cultural experiences are linked, is reached by the narrative. Not only is the novel as a whole constantly revisiting, reimagining, and entangling the various pasts, but in doing so it is forging multidirectional links between migrant communities through its own act of determined remembering.

In addition to the mirroring of migrant experiences examined above, Phillips uses the same device to explore the issue of white English prejudice and hostility towards migrant groups perceived as invasive. In an early scene, Bruce, a documentary filmmaker who prides himself on his 'Old Labour' politics, states that

the asylum seekers, and those migrants from the subcontinent who come here to marry their cousins, they have every right to be here no matter how hard some of us may find it to accept them. But this cheap Eastern European labour in the wake of EU expansion, well to Old Labour men like myself this just doesn't seem fair.

The casual racism inherent in Bruce's eulogising of multicultural migration advocates multidirectionality ironically by displaying the failures of multiculturalism to embed non-racialised values. He rejects those migrating to England for better wages and a better standard of living (the implication being that they threaten "English" jobs and wages), whilst simultaneously accepting Commonwealth migration. This veneer of acceptance is tempered by an objectification of these Commonwealth migrants, reducing them to an incestuous, backwards race that must be tolerated if not embraced. In this way *In the Falling Snow* explores the failure of England to 'belong equally to all its citizens' (Kymlica 65). The 'cheap Eastern European labour' that Bruce decries is only the latest in a long chain of post-war migrants to England who experience the detrimental stratifications of English society. The narrative charts the phenomenon that as each wave of migration arrives in England, dominant discourses shift to include the older migrants and exclude the new. These attitudes are "mirrored" later in the novel, although again, not in chronological order. When Keith's white English stepmother, Brenda, meets him for the first time as a child, she blithely tells him that 'if [your dad] doesn't hurry up the Pakis will have all the jobs' (222), and then goes on to warn him that at his new school 'I imagine they'll be laying it on thick with you . . . but I won't have name-calling' (222). The similarity between Brenda's and Bruce's comments is striking: they are both privileging and accepting one longstanding immigrant group whilst rejecting another intrusive, unfamiliar group. These textual moments mirror Keith's interactions with Danuta and Rolf, and further implicate him in notions of Englishness which privilege established minorities over newly arrived migrants. In addition to these two moments of explicit mirroring, there are other, more subtle mirrorings in the text. For example, Keith's active pursuit of

his junior colleague, research assistant Yvette. After he ends their romantic liaison, she exposes his workplace infidelity, and he is suspended from his job. Yet it doesn't take long for him to begin to fixate on pursuing a seemingly unrequited attraction to Danuta. Similarly to his relationship with Yvette, he attempts to exploit a position of power (that of the native Englishman) over Danuta, and is thwarted in those attempts. Yvette, after filing a formal sexual harassment complaint, is 'offered a pay rise and a promotion' (250). While there are no lasting consequences to his dalliance with Danuta, she does not bend to his will in the way he expects, rejecting his advances.

Keith's inability to forge multidirectional connections with those around him is finally illustrated in the novel's ambiguous ending. Present in his former family home for the revelation of Laurie's girlfriend's unplanned pregnancy, this moment of (re)generation does not develop as Laurie assures his father that he and Chantelle will 'get it sorted' (327). Rather, the regeneration which the reader is directed towards becomes the moment between Keith and Annabelle, as she insists he stay overnight in their former home. Taking control of the situation, Annabelle insists "Just give me the tray and go to sleep, alright? . . . "We can talk about everything else in the morning" (330). This echoes what Keith has just said to his son, that 'we can talk later, or tomorrow' (328). The sense of perpetual delay is intensified as the morning never arrives, the narrative ending as Keith 'lies back on the pillow and . . . hears her footsteps as she begins to walk slowly up the stairs' (330). Keith, who has spent most of the novel lamenting the breakdown of his relationship with Annabelle and Laurie, nevertheless resists this "happy ending", resolving to return to his flat, but his actions belie this as he reclines on his former marital bed. However, in his failure to communicate fully with either his son or his wife, in delaying discussion until a narrative "tomorrow" which never arrives, Keith continues to stymie the possibilities for connectivity between himself and his loved ones. In spite, or perhaps because of,



this moment of suspension between the couple, Phillips allows for a hopeful moment in the narrative which foresees a reconciliation between the two, which in turn gestures towards the reconciliatory possibilities of multidirectionality. Despite Keith's continued reservations, the potential for individual contact establishes the multidirectional project of the novel. This ambiguous ending sounds a note of hope, as the novel offers what Keith fails to see. In these final narrative scenes, Phillips produces a vibrant, circuitous route through which multidirectional links can be forged.

Reading *In the Falling Snow* with recourse to Michael Rothberg's multidirectional lens brings particular attention to the novel's transnational European trajectories, which in turn allows for a conceptual revision of Englishness. Phillips's narrative problematises national discourses predicated on nativity, but it does so without relying on diasporic tropes of belonging. Rather, *In the Falling Snow* historicises connections across both diasporic and European migrant subjects. Through its indexing of the complex routes of community and memory in contemporary English life, the novel memorialises the contemporary period, allowing for a new collective expression of what I term 'multidirectional consciousness'. As my reading has shown, Phillips's recursive narrative form and "mirroring" of memories takes on Rothberg's 'supple logic' of multidirectionality and in doing so formulates an alternative to contemporary cellular multiculturalism. Phillips stresses the need for responsible remembering, postulating contemporary history as a contested multidirectional narration that requires perpetual witness. Although his characters fail to communicate fully in their experience of multidirectional consciousness, in charting different interpretations and modes of "Englishness", Phillips creates a multidirectional *narrative* consciousness which brings the community together in a collective, rather than a competitive, social memory.

As evidenced in this chapter, the formal structure of Phillips's contemporary "English" novels offer complex narratives which work to illuminate the potential for individuals to transcend narrow iterations of national culture and belonging.<sup>18</sup> As his problematic protagonists make limited discursive gestures towards cross-cultural communication, the narratives allow a critique of the 'fault lines' inherent in conceptualisations of belonging. Stephen Clingman has argued in an early response to the novel that, with the characterisation of Dorothy in *A Distant Shore*, Phillips posits a 'logic of displacement [which] is inseparable from national "belonging"' ('England has Changed' 47). In addition, he identifies the complex formal narrative as echoing the critique of the nation as 'far from cohesive, horizontally unified, or identical' ('England has Changed' 51). However, despite this dislocation of belonging, the attempts by Dorothy and Solomon to communicate across the boundaries of their experience, however faltering and abortive, gesture towards the ability of cosmopolitan modes of being to facilitate transcultural communication. Returning to Clingman's later analysis of the novel in *The Grammar of Identity*, he contends that

it is as if time and narration were being pulled inside out, or rotating in different directions: not only are there times within times in the novel, but they are aligned and shifting versions of narration. All this is layered, ever-present in Gabriel's body and mind: it is the fractured nature, in vast and disparate form, of the migrant experience.

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<sup>18</sup> David Ellis has posited a similar argument in his article "'They are Us': Caryl Phillips' *A Distant Shore* and the British transnation'. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 48:3 (2013). 411-23. However, Ellis's argument focuses on the individual's struggle for recognition within the limits of the national, whereas my reading emphasises the communal ramifications of individual gestures towards transculturalism.

These narrative and national concerns are, for Clingman, crucial to the transnational reach of the novel. In repositioning Clingman's reading in parallel with Rothberg's theory of multidirectionality, however, my reading of the novel posits that the faltering and incomplete efforts at transcultural communication which Dorothy and Solomon engage in vitally transform the limitations of the national and local spheres. Locating these efforts within a cosmopolitan discourse, rather than relying on the vocabulary of the multicultural or transnational, allows a transformative English subjectivity to emerge. Similarly, with *In the Falling Snow*, Phillips's characterisation of the attempts by Keith to connect meaningfully on an individual level with those around him gesture towards an attempt at multidirectional consciousness. Phillips's narrative structures, therefore, can be seen to allow for conceptual revisions of Englishness which, rather than highlighting the dislocation of the black Briton, uses their transformative position to throw into relief the problematics of contemporary cellular communities, and allows for a tentative postulation of an alternative mode of belonging. Returning briefly to Phillips's introduction to *Colour Me English*, he states that he

believe[s] passionately in the moral capacity of fiction to wrench us out of our ideological burrows and force us to engage with a world that is clumsily transforming itself . . . as long as we have literature as a bulwark against intolerance, and as force for change, then we have a chance.

(*'Colour Me English'* 16)

This belief in the transformative power of fiction to articulate what our society lacks is representative of the work of the narratives we encounter in *A Distant Shore* and *In the Falling Snow*. The small moments of compassion between the disparate and culturally separated characters of the two novels allow for a revision of nationalistic discourses and posit an alternative trajectory for both the migrant and the “native” English subject.

## Chapter Two

### Constrained Cosmopolitanisms in Zadie Smith's Willesden novels

Continuing the emphasis on the communal in contemporary black British writing, I turn now to the work of novelist and critic Zadie Smith. In particular I will focus upon *White Teeth* (2000), and Smith's most recently published novel, *NW* (2012). Arriving on the black British literary scene at the turn of the millennium with the publication of her much-anticipated debut novel *White Teeth*, Smith quickly became famous not just for the runaway success of her first novel, but also the unprecedentedly large publishing advance which she secured as a twenty two year old Cambridge University student. Since the publication of *White Teeth*, Smith has consolidated her role as figurehead for black British writing as a whole, and black British women's writing in particular. *White Teeth*'s setting is Smith's home borough of Willesden in London, and the novel charts the 'mixed-up situation' (Squires 37) of three families of varying degrees of "Britishness" – Jamaican/English, Pakistani, Jewish – as they navigate the newly christened multiculturalism of the late twentieth century. *NW* returns the reader to that locale but in a contemporary setting, that of post-crash London, at the tail-end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

In advancing towards a cosmopolitan reading of Smith's novels, I frame my reading with reference to Berthold Schoene's interpretation of the cosmopolitan novel as 'imagining the world as one community' (13). In reading the London of *White Teeth* and *NW* within this broad cosmopolitan framework, I identify Smith's work as being indicative of a 'contemporary cosmopolitanism that bears rupturing and indeed thrives on recurrent reassemblage' (Schoene 21). The place of London within a global economy of movement and trade which at once ruptures and then reassembles communities along localised lines, rather than maintains national or ethnic

distinctions, is explored within the novels. Indeed, Smith's focus on the cosmopolitan constraints located within the particularised locale of Willesden explores what Schoene recognises as 'the global primarily as a precariously fragile residential locus' (4) of vernacular cosmopolitanism. I argue that Smith's work problematizes the elitist connotations of cosmopolitanism.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, her work can be seen to exemplify an inclusive, if constrained, cosmopolitanism. It is this articulation of a contemporary constrained cosmopolitanism that this chapter will explore.

Central to the articulation of a cosmopolitan outlook in the two novels is the specific city space of London. Timothy Brennan has argued that 'even as ideals like collectivity, community and self-sufficiency have been fought for, the metropolis is largely equated with their absence' (Brennan 2). He argues that, on the contrary, the metropolis is the site on which inequitable globalised plurality finds expression. The transcultural products of the global movement of peoples and cultures across nations are illustrated by the cultural endeavours of "pluralised" cities such as London. Indeed, such problematic pluralities have regularly been identified by cultural critics. Ashley Dawson has criticised what he terms the tendency postcolonial critiques to place black and Asian cultures in Britain as

exemplify[ing] forms of cosmopolitanism that undermine reified models of cultural identity . . . although theories of hybridity are intended to challenge exclusionary models of belonging, they suffer from their own forms of determinism as a result of their programmatic and diasporic cosmopolitanism. All too often, this analysis simply inverts the dominant tropes of colonial discourse by representing diasporic populations as inherently progressive.

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<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the *cosmopolitan flaneur*, see Chapters One and Three.

The satirisation of contemporary culture which is evident in Smith's work (particularly in *White Teeth*), goes some way to refuting Dawson's hypothesis. The narrative mocks both Samad Iqbal's attempts at ethnic absolutism and the Chalfens' attempts at cultural appropriation and privileged cosmopolitanism. Rather than reifying diasporic transculturalism, *White Teeth* exposes the inherent difficulties of forming a plural community through the problematic interactions of Joyce Chalfen with Clara Jones and Alsana Iqbal, as the three women navigate opposing cultural expectations of family life. Yet the enduring potential of what I shall term a cosmopolitanism of constraint – a cosmopolitanism in which the limits and barriers of human understanding retain their agency – to produce a collective community of self-sufficiency is imagined through Irie Jones's pregnancy at the end of the novel. Irie, who cannot biologically determine which twin, Magid or Millat, is the father of her unborn child, becomes the figure in which pluralism is clinched. In doing so, the novel re-invigorates the multicultural milieu of the city which, according to some commentators, has failed to deliver progressive plurality. The 'plural monoculturalisms' (Sen 157) that Amartya Sen identified as indicative of British multiculturalism have given rise to a London which, according to David Dabydeen,

packs people in. They live on top of each other, alongside each other, sideways to each other. The city is a hive in this sense, but there are no inevitable passageways between one cell and another.

( Dabydeen 104)

Each ‘cell’, or ‘monoculturalism’ in Sen’s words, exists in parallel to another, forging a plurality which does not instinctively give rise to hybridisation, as Dawson argued. Without the ‘inevitable passageways’ between communities, the realisation of a cosmopolitan city space is restricted – as evidenced by the fraught city crossings of Felix and Natalie in *NW*, as we will consider presently. Yet the recognition of plural selfhoods in the novel – in Natalie and Leah’s determination to live lives that escape the confines of expectation – gives rise to a tentative cosmopolitanism that identifies and interpolates restraint. It is this tentative cosmopolitanism that articulates an ‘internally rich and disparate plurality’ (Brennan 2), despite its narrative limitations.

*White Teeth* was published amidst a backdrop of the increasing public visibility of the contributions of black and Asian Britons to British cultural life at the turn of the millennium.<sup>20</sup> The novel presents a satirical view of diasporic English subjects traversing the multicultural landscape of post-War London. Dominic Head’s definitive reading of *White Teeth* declared that ‘through its complex plot, its broad post-war historical sweep, and its insistent summative portrayal of a *de facto* hybrid cultural life, [*White Teeth*] is artfully constructed as the definitive representation of twentieth-century British multiculturalism’ (106, emphasis in orig.). Smith’s protagonists, however, are characterised as being affected by the echoes of colonial cosmopolitanism, regardless of race or privilege, and as such her text represents a vision of multiracial English community which begins to move beyond the constraints of contemporary liberal multiculturalism, and in doing so began to break out of the cellular nature of multicultural communities. It is my contention that, coming at the

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<sup>20</sup> In 1998, the BBC aired the four-part documentary series “Windrush” to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the *SS Windrush* at Tilbury Docks, carrying with it around 492 West Indian migrants. Accompanying the series was the book *Windrush: The Irresistable Rise of Multi-Racial Britain*. 1998. (London: Harpercollins, 1998), which was co-authored by Mike and Trevor Phillips.



end of the 1990s (a decade in which the political policies of multiculturalism were consolidated) the publication of *White Teeth* provided an examination of the limits of British multiculturalism, and not, as Head argued, a presentation of a ‘genuinely multicultural Britain’ (107).

When *White Teeth* was published, Smith’s publishers hailed her as ‘the new Salman Rushdie’ (Moss np). At one point in the novel, a young Millat Iqbal, grappling with the vexed negotiations of being both British and Muslim, travels to the North of England to participate in the mass burning of copies of Rushdie’s infamous novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988). While Millat does not fully understand the political or personal ramifications of his actions, when his mother Alsana learns of his actions she promptly retaliates by burning all of his ‘secular’ possessions on the family’s front lawn, because ‘either everything is sacred or nothing is. And if he starts burning other people’s things, then he loses something sacred also. Everyone gets what’s coming, sooner or later’ (*White Teeth* 237). Alsana’s reasoning is that to conform to a fundamentalist reasoning without thought or understanding places the sacred and the profane on a parallel trajectory. Smith presents the Rushdie affair as not just the starting place of British Muslim cultural displacement, but also of being complicit in the restraint of a plural cosmopolitanism. Kenan Malik, whose work has helped to delineate the relationship of multiculturalism to cosmopolitanism thus far, argues that it was against the background of the Rushdie affair that Britain became

increasingly polarized on the issue of race, a nation in which a new intensity of racism was matched by the fierceness of the response from a new generation of blacks and Asians, [and it was from this] that the multicultural policies of the 1980s developed. One of the myths of recent years is that Britain became a multicultural nation because minorities demanded that their differences be

recognized. Multicultural policies were, in fact, imposed from the top, part of a government strategy to defuse the anger created by racism.

(*From Fatwa to Jihad* 41)

Smith's handling of the Rushdie affair in the novel highlights the irony of secular British Muslims who felt a righteous indignation at the perceived religious blasphemy contained within the pages of *The Satanic Verses*. Neither Millat, his fellow members of the amusingly problematically acronym-ed KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation), or his father Samad have read the novel, and yet they take up figurative arms against it in order to come together as a community. That Millat, who listens to Michael Jackson and smokes marijuana, and his adulterous father Samad, who spends his evenings whiling away the hours in the pub with Archie, do not recognise the hypocrisy in their actions points to the inability of the diasporic community to embrace transculturalism. Contrariwise, Alsana recognises the importance of respecting cultures regardless of belonging, and she comes to exemplify a localised cosmopolitan outlook which rejects the narrow confines of anti-racist multiculturalism in favour of plural communities. It is these attempts at pluralisation within the confines of multicultural spaces with which the narrative of *White Teeth* grapples.

The hugely ambitious novel chronicles three London families as they negotiate the complex multi-racial spaces which inhabit the London of the latter half of the twentieth-century. Consequently, Smith was hailed for 'creat[ing] a dazzlingly complex world of cross-cultural fusion' (C. Phillips 'Mixed and Matched' np). The novel follows the fate of three London-based families, the Joneses, the Iqbals, and the Chalfens. Their fortunes are intertwined by the friendship of Englishman Archie and Bengali Samad, who fought alongside one another during the Second World War.

After the war, Archie returns to England with his mentally unstable Italian wife, Ophelia, and is followed later by Samad, who emigrates to the UK with his much younger wife, Alsana, and looks up his old wartime colleague. Following his divorce from Ophelia, Archie meets and marries teenaged Jamaican immigrant Clara Bowden, and they eventually have a daughter, Irie. Irie grows up alongside Samad and Alsana's twin boys, Magid and Millat, and their exploits as youngsters in the nascently multicultural English school system, their friendship with the secular Jewish family, the Chalfens, Millat's flirtation with fundamental Islam, and the repercussions of Magid's paternally imposed exile back to Bangladesh, form the bulk of the novel's action. Smith's innovative representation of non-axial migrant experience anticipates later twenty first-century fiction from writers such as Andrea Levy, Bernardine Evaristo, and Caryl Phillips, in depicting multicultural communities in England from a range of ethnic viewpoints.

Smith's novel is formally separated into 4 sections: Archie 1974, 1945; Samad 1984, 1857; Irie 1990, 1907; and Magid, Millat and Marcus 1992, 1999. In addition, Smith self-consciously intertextualises her work by referencing well-known works of literature, scholarship, and popular culture in her chapter titles.<sup>21</sup> In doing so Smith places her novel within a globalised context of cultural output in English and signals the influence of existing works on Smith's own evolution as a writer. Whilst the novel is narrated contemporaneously, through the ascribing of historical ancestral events to Samad and Irie's narratives and the flashbacks to Archie and Samad's wartime

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<sup>21</sup>The Miseducation of Irie Jones' references Lauryn Hill's 1998 debut album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*; 'The End of History versus The Last Man' refers to *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) by Frances Fukuyama, a book that details his belief that Western Liberalism signifies the endpoint of sociocultural evolution; and 'Of Mice and Memory', a play on Steinbeck's seminal novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937), taught in most English secondary schools as part of the GCSE curriculum for over twenty years.

exploits, Smith clearly links her characters' contemporary experiences of metropolitan England with the colonial, diasporic repercussions of empire. However, the pre-occupations of the novel remain explicitly contemporary, particularly the focus on the evolution of genetic engineering and the problem of fundamentalism amongst young British-Asian communities. If, as Smith's Shakespearean epigraph reminds the reader, 'what's past is prologue' (np), then the predicaments with which contemporary English society contends can be traced to the ways in which it has traversed the multiracial landscape of multiculturalism, and in particular the ways in which it has failed to deliver a post-racial society by remaining caught up in residual conflicts. In both its textual preoccupation with the historical resonances of identity formation, and its grappling with the problem of community and family attempting to cross the borders of racial and religious stratifications, *White Teeth* presents an alternative to multiculturalism, and instead posits a 'historically contingent and inherently relational' urban cosmopolitanism (Sandercock 49). Smith's narrative represents British multiculturalism as constrained by the country's colonial past, and in linking the exploits of her contemporary characters' to their ancestral pasts, she shows them as striving hopefully towards a non-constrained multiculturalism. In doing so Smith's novel challenges the accepted rubric of multiculturalism, inviting instead a mooted cosmopolitanism which incorporates both past and present into a more coherent and progressive future.

In my reading of *White Teeth* as a repudiation of cellular multiculturalism, the importance of the past is significant to the text, both formally and in the narrative. When approaching the issue of historical memory in relation to the novel, I am conscious that '*White Teeth* demonstrates the impossibility of escaping history or of living entirely outside of its influence' (Paproth 15). In approaching the novel in this way, I am interested in examining Dave Gunning's proposition that by 'accepting that

ethnicity politics might only meaningfully relate to the individual's negotiation of history' (149), then 'a conception of ethnicity as an individual's relation to history begins to emerge: a contingent articulation of a necessary relation to an imagined past' (136). In other words, it is this 'necessary relation to an imagined past' which is so vital to the representation of those of London-born migrants who often have little or no direct knowledge of their ancestral homelands. Yet the articulation of history in Smith's narrative is often not to be trusted. Samad struggles to discover the historical "truth" of his infamous ancestor, Mangal Pande; Archie hides the truth of his botched war-time assassination attempt from both Samad and his family; and Magid, the twin sent back to Bangladesh to learn about his ancestral culture and inculcate himself in his religious heritage, rejects the uncertainties of religious belief and returns to England to assist Marcus Chalfen in his eugenics project. In representing the inconsistencies of relying upon myths of heritage, Smith problematises contemporary representations of migrant experience within the boundaries of restrictive communities. Zygmunt Bauman asserts that identities are predicated on 'using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being' ('From Pilgrim to Tourist' 4). As such, the representation of Smith's characters within the context of their 'imagined' historical pasts allows for the expression of 'what [they] might become', rather than a reductive articulation of where they have come from (their history) as the only avenue for them to connect with the communities around them ('From Pilgrim to Tourist' 4).

Ashley Dawson argues that '*White Teeth* self-consciously parodies the biological determinism of much hybridity discourse through its depiction of Samad's transformation in Britain' (160). He warns that viewing diasporic communities as 'exemplify[ing] forms of cosmopolitanism that undermine reified models of cultural identity' (160) risks a disavowal of the troubling tendency towards 'ethnic

primordialism' contained within contemporary cellular multiculturalism, in which communities are encouraged to exist alongside, but not integrally within, other racial and cultural groups. Indeed, Smith's narrative problematises community politics, criticised as 'long [having] failed to accept and assimilate different identities via the process of multiculturalism' (Mirze 199). Smith's satire is one of, to coin a phrase, equal opportunism. Not only does she satirise the attempts by Samad and his son Millat for ethnic absolutism by way of parallel fundamentalisms, but she also mocks the privileging of multiculturalism as a post-racial discourse in her representation of Irie's attempts to traverse her multiple racial heritages. In so doing, the failure of the policy of multiculturalism to integrate a sense of multi-racial heritage into representations of Englishness is exposed. This is not to say that previous black British literary works had not succeeded in approaching ideas of Englishness 'through a second-generation diaspora sensibility' (McLeod 'Measuring Englishness' 4) which affected the very fabric of Englishness itself. Rather, Smith's work highlights the risk of approaching the problem of representation from only one, diasporic, perspective, and instead allows for a demonstration of community which develops from an emphasis on the subject as able to traverse the constraints of insular and exclusionary multicultural groups. In this way the novel posits a rejection of community and a focus on the individual as a locus of positive change towards a transcultural future, in which free movement exists across cultural and racial boundaries.

Criticism around Smith's *White Teeth* has tended to focus on the novel's 'mixed-up situation . . . a theme that incorporates the legacy of the empire, the assemblage of immigrants in the old imperial centers, and the multicultural societies that are thus produced' (Squires 23). Indeed, the novel is characterised by the summation that 'the issue of home and origins haunts *White Teeth*' (Squires 37). The form of Smith's novel undeniably addresses the issue of historical memory in the

formation of contemporary communities – yet, I will argue that Smith’s location of her story in the fixed, cellular multiculturalism of the late twentieth-century is, in fact, a critique of the regressive realities of multicultural Britain. In so doing, I will reject a reading of *White Teeth* as ‘represent[ing] an optimistic view of multi-culturalism’ (Squires 41), arguing that Smith’s at times aggressive use of satire is more usefully read as cosmopolitan critique of the communities which have sprung up in a postcolonial, multicultural London. Cosmopolitanism in this sense can be characterised as ‘a specific attitude towards difference and thus the possession of a set of skills that allow individuals to negotiate and understand cultural diversity’ (Binnie et al. 4). According to Binnie, cosmopolitan practices require a skilful navigation of difference in order to articulate inclusive strategies of communal living on a local level. Smith’s novel is not characterised by a preoccupation with global citizenship. Rather, it locates the cosmopolitan in the local experience of negotiating parallel cultural communities which are not represented as requiring assimilation or integration, but hope to coexist in a space of meaningful transcultural interaction. Writing in 2004, John McLeod posited that ‘*White Teeth* stands at the end of a busy decade of postcolonial London representations’ (*Postcolonial London* 162). McLeod positions Smith’s novel, published in 2000, at the “tail” of the last decade of the twentieth century, and representing a ‘familiar “postimmigrant” style’ (*Postcolonial London* 162). My work, in contrast, positions *White Teeth* at the “head” of the twenty-first century. By repositioning Smith in this way, I hope to highlight the novel’s usefulness in heralding a new approach to representations of London by contemporary writers. If ‘one of the distinguishing features between postmillennial black British writers and the first generation . . . is that the younger writers offer a different discussion of Britishness, identity, and cultural conflict’ (Walters 5), my aim is to

identify the ways in which Smith accomplishes this through a rendering of multiracial London as a non-privileged cosmopolitan space.

One reading of *White Teeth*, then, is that it evidences the late-twentieth century preoccupation with a calling to account of postcolonial Britain, as historians, sociologists, and later, the Government itself began to explore the impact of post-War immigration and subsequent legislation that contributed to the so-called crisis of multiculturalism. In the aftermath of the race riots in Bradford, Burnley, and Oldham in 2001, and particularly after the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 bombings in London (perpetrated by four British-born men, three of whom were British Asians living in Leeds), '[t]he concept of "community cohesion" was quickly developed to tackle the "parallel lives" experienced by white and black communities' (Cantle 9). The framework of cohesion was intended to reconcile communities by 'changing underlying attitudes and values' (Cantle 26) to combat the misunderstanding fostered through multiculturalism that the equality of one community depended upon the constraint of another. The move towards the policy of community cohesion 'marks the emergence of integration discourses explicitly predicated on the failure of multiculturalism' (Lentin and Titley 43), and relocates exclusion onto fixed cultural, rather than racial, markers. This progression can be seen as a direct response to the shifting of tensions within and around the British Asian community, evidenced by the 2001 riots. Smith's novel, drawing on the reaction of British Muslims to the publication of Salman Rushdie's polemical novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, foreshadows the increasing influence of radical Islam and fundamentalist modes of thinking on twenty-first century political life. Liberal multiculturalism has found itself ill-equipped to adapt to increasing levels of religious fundamentalism, and this has contributed to an atmosphere in which multiculturalism is seen to be in "crisis". Writing just before these events brought the shortcomings of multiculturalism into view, Smith presciently satirizes the effect of



multiculturalism on the expression of identity and community, rather than espousing a utopian view of the productivity of multiculturalism as policy. In reflecting on the ‘imagined past’ of her diasporic characters, she allows a reading of the novel as a repudiation of the constraints of liberal multiculturalism, and instead opens up a discussion of English communities within the framework of a non-privileged cosmopolitanism. Given the breadth and scope of the novel, I will focus on Smith’s characterisation of selected key figures – Irie Jones, Millat Iqbal, Alsana Iqbal, Joyce Chalfen, and Ophelia and Clara Jones – to evidence my reading of the text. Ultimately I will relate Smith’s representation of these figures to a diasporic cosmopolitanism which embraces contingency, rejecting the constrained communities of contemporary multiculturalism.

Archie Jones’s wives represent two experiences of the female migrant in twentieth-century Europe. Archie meets his first wife, Ophelia, at the end of the Second World War, in a cafe in Italy as he awaits transport back to England. Marrying her and bringing her to live in England proves to be a mistake, as she drifts into an undefined mental illness which ultimately leads to the breakdown of their marriage. Of Ophelia, Samad laments ‘[s]he is born, she lives, simply in the wrong time! This is just not her day! Maybe not her millennium’ (*White Teeth* 13). Indeed, it is not the Italian Ophelia’s “time”. The slow dismantling of her mental health mirrors the dismantling of the European colonial dream in the post-war era, and Samad points out that her day is coming to an end, just as the peoples of the former colonies begin their own ascent onto the international stage. Europe is being reconceptualised in the wake of Imperialism, requiring that ‘new forms of European memory include the dimensions of gender and ‘race’’ (Passerini 51), yet Ophelia hallucinates ‘that she was the maid of the celebrated fifteenth-century art lover Cosimo de’Medici’ (13), returning her to the hegemonic, Christian narrative of Eurocentric paternalist tradition.

After twenty years of living a small, un-ambitious life with Archie, Ophelia's mind returns her to the culture of her birth, but also to a reassuring structure of hierarchy. This return to a sense of European cultural ascendancy is also reflected in Smith's choice of name for Archie's first wife – the name Ophelia being inextricably linked with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Ophelia functions as a figure not only of Archie's past as a war "hero", but also of Europe's colonial past. Her inability to adjust to life in post-War England not only foreshadows the difficulties that the other migrant figures, Clara, Alsana and Samad, have in establishing themselves in an often hostile and constraining England, but also establishes the fallacy of clinging to the past as a golden era. Through the figure of Ophelia, then, Smith briefly engages with the migrant past, and provides a blueprint for the coming struggles of Clara and Alsana.

Like Ophelia, Archie's second wife is also a foreigner. Clara is a nineteen year old Jamaican immigrant who escapes her mother's fundamentalist Jehovah's Witness' beliefs through marriage to the middle-aged Archie. Isolated by her mother's evangelising and her own strong Jamaican accent, Clara forges a hesitant friendship with Samad's young wife, Alsana, that 'begins as a rearguard action against their husband's friendship [but] soon develops' (74) through their mutual pregnancies. The bond felt by the two migrant women strengthens through their navigation of parenting English-born children. As the two women emerge in their roles, it is Alsana who pushes Clara to acknowledge the problematic nature of the children's relationship with Joyce Chalfen. Discussing their teenage children's growing infatuation with the Chalfen family over the telephone, Clara reports that

‘. . . I got quite upset at first, but then I thought I was just being silly. Archie says I'm being silly.’

‘If you told that potato-head there was no gravity on the moon he’d think you were being silly. We get by without his opinion for fifteen years, we’ll manage without it now. Clara,’ said Alsana, and her heavy breath rattled against the receiver, her voice sounded exhausted, ‘we always *stand by each other*.... I *need* you now.’

(345, emphasis in orig.)

Alsana refutes the control of the two husbands over their respective family units, and asserts that it is left to the two migrant mothers to join forces against the colonising efforts of Joyce. Alsana relates Joyce to colonial histories, and she refuses to interpret Joyce’s influence on Millat and Irie as a positive one: she characterises Joyce and her family as ‘little scavenging English birds picking at all the best seeds!’ (344), invoking the imagery of imperial paternalism towards the two immigrant families. Whilst Clara attempts to broker peace between the families, visiting Joyce and thanking her, Alsana remains resolute, unwavering in her disapproval of what she sees as Joyce’s meddling. Alsana’s approach is one of strength: she is confident in her role as mother, knowing that this is a more solid foundation than Joyce’s passing interest in her son. She berates Samad for his lack of interest in the situation with the Chalfens, telling him ‘[t]his is what men do. They make the mess, the century ends, and they leave the women to clear up the shit’ (438). Despite what some would perceive as Alsana’s subordinate position to an older husband in an arranged marriage, she uses her position as mother to leverage power in their relationship, punishing Samad for his failings as a husband and father. Clara, in contrast, is meeker, allowing herself to be manipulated into a liminal position in relation to the Chalfens, afraid that their influence will disestablish her role as mother to Irie. In the conflicting responses of Alsana and Clara, Smith resists a heterogeneous narrative of migrant experience of the “host country”. While

Alsana believes that remaining within the confines of her community will salvage her family unit, Clara struggles to define what constitutes the boundaries of the community around her. However, neither of these positions is unproblematic. In focussing on the history of her country's interactions with England and consistently linking Joyce's behaviour to those actions, Alsana effectively stops any meaningful cultural exchange from taking place between the two families. Clara, on the other hand, is not regarded by Joyce as an equal, and in struggling to define her family background also struggles to defend her family unit. The twins Magid and Millat react to the rigid expectations of their parents by breaking out of the expected boundaries of behaviour, while in contrast Irie struggles to define the limits of her identity in the absence of guidance from her parents. In Smith's work it is these children who represent the failure of contemporary multicultural communities adequately to traverse multiple locations of cultural belonging.

Irie, the mixed-race child of Clara and Archie's union, grows up separated from her "Jamaican" heritage, in the form of her grandmother, Hortense, with whom Clara maintains a fraught distance. When Irie goes to live with her grandmother for a short period of time, Clara despairs "[f]irst I have to keep her from those Chalfens" . . . her voice a *tremolando* of anger and fear, "And now *you people* again" (394, emphasis in orig.). Clara struggles to develop in her maternal role, always afraid that Irie will choose to affiliate with another group over her own family unit. Irie's proximity to the Bengali Iqbals and the Jewish Chalfens, two families knowledgeable of, if removed from, their diasporic histories, leads to a deeply ingrained desire to understand her own history and heritage. An overweight teenager struggling with her 'substantial Jamaican frame' (265), Irie attempts to reconfigure her figure through an illusory wardrobe, desperate to conform to an "English rose" ideal of beauty. Smith presents Irie's concerns with her appearance to the reader, 'Irie didn't know she was

fine. There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land' (266).<sup>22</sup> Irie reflects the strangeness, the lack of "reflection" in English culture with which the mixed-race subject contends. She is the character who most closely mirrors Smith's own background – Afro-Caribbean mother, white father, born in the 1970s – and like other writers of her generation, Smith attempts through Irie to embody the strangeness of being the other when your heritage is intertwined with the normative. The signification of Irie's mixed-race identity, and her failure to identify with the mirrored image of England she sees in expressions of Englishness as whiteness, reiterates the symbolic meanings which theories of racial difference attach to 'real or manufactured physical differences' (Ifekwunigwe 42). These 'manufactured differences' lead to formations of race and cultural access as exclusive, so that the 'territorialised Englishness and the de-territorialised English-African diaspora' (Ifekwunigwe 42) are ultimately represented in opposition to one another, even when applied to the mixed-race subject, who could be in a position to transcend such racial markers. If Irie can successfully negotiate the divisions which surround her, then she will inhabit a space of interstitial agency which allows her to negotiate equivocally with the power structures around her.

Irie's desperation to conform to an Anglo-American ideal of beauty leads to her first, traumatic, visit to an "Afro-Caribbean" hairstylist. Desperate for 'straight straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair' (273), she disregards warnings that her hair is unsuitable in its washed state. The ammonia destroys her hair, forcing her to replace it with freshly

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<sup>22</sup>This quotation again references the position of the migrant as a 'stranger in a strange land', also referenced repeatedly by Caryl Phillips, as discussed in the previous chapter. This quotation is an allusion to Exodus 2:22, in which Moses, who has fled Egypt, names his son Gershom 'for he said: I have been a stranger in a strange land' (King James Bible), and can be linked to Caryl Phillips's use of the same nomenclature, discussed in the previous chapter.

shorn and sold sub-Continental hair. After being ridiculed in the Iqbal house for her 'poor oppressed Pakistani' hair (283), the passage ends with Irie standing in the Iqbals hallway, 'facing her own reflection, busy tearing out somebody else's hair with her bare hands' (289). In this scene, the desperation to embody a racially specific ideal of beauty (ironically through the purchase of non-European hair) is shown to obscure Irie's recognition of herself as self rather than other. Popular black hairstyles – and particularly the fashion for black women to straighten their naturally curly hair – have long been characterised as promoting a 'negative black aesthetic' by expressing 'subjective enslavement to Eurocentric definitions of beauty' (Mercer 97). However, Kobena Mercer, in his 1994 exploration of the politics of black hair, argues that black hairstyles function not as a 'diseased state of black consciousness' (97), but instead are a site of transcultural sharing, wherein popular hairstyles are racially cross-pollinated between black and white alike. Mercer backs up his claims with reference to Dreadlocks, a "natural" black hairstyle popularised by the Rastafarians and appropriated into white subculture. He argues that, because black people who straighten their hair appropriate the straightness with culturally specific use of colour and cut, they redefine rather than are defined by the Eurocentric aesthetic. Irie, however, is not accommodated within this sociological definition of black hair precisely because of her position as a transcultural community member. As a mixed-race woman who has been shielded from her maternal cultural inventories, she lacks the ability to re-appropriate ethnic markers of either group, and so struggles to find a space of recognition. Unconstrained by a primordial racial identity, Irie nonetheless craves the sense of belonging she believes would result from an identity anchored in the Afro-Caribbean community, and she struggles with her ability to transcend such ethnic constraints due to her mixed heritage and Clara's efforts to disassociate her daughter with black culture. This imperfect cultural hybridity is exposed by Irie's

reflection in the mirror, of the bodily violation of her perfectly straight, red, Pakistani hair.

Included in the same section of the novel is Smith's examination of the tensions faced by the novel's only mono-ethnic family unit, the Iqbals. Millat, the twin fated by his father to remain in the family home in England, is characterised by his inability to reconcile the two facets of influence: his Muslim faith and his English surroundings. Lampooned by his cousin Neena, she tells Irie

[L]ook how confused he is. One day he's Allah this, Allah that. Next minute it's big busty blondes, Russian gymnasts and a smoke of the sinsemilla. He doesn't know his arse from his elbow. Just like his father. He doesn't know who he is.

(284)

Millat's struggle to define himself amidst the conflicting constraints of multiple cultural influences parallels Irie appearance at the Iqbal home with artificially straightened, Westernised hair. Unlike Irie, who attempts to align herself within the limits of community, Millat seeks to free himself of the expectations placed on him as a member of a diasporic community of faith. Stuart Hall, also writing in 2000, asserted that 'identities declare not some primordial identity but rather a positional choice of the group with which they wish to be associated' ('The Multi-cultural Question' 220). In other words, the position of second-generation members of migrant communities is one of constant flux, in which allegiances can be chosen and traditions adapted to suit individual needs. However, as we have seen, this flux is not unproblematic, and it is not always welcome or accommodated. Indeed, Millat's juxtaposition of fundamentalist allegiance to radical Islam with continued promiscuity

and drug use, and Irie's obsession with an idealised sense of "English" beauty that gives way to an aggressive identification with her Jamaican heritage, are presented as traversals of what Hall characterises as 'cosmopolitan communities' ('The Multi-cultural Question' 221) through which the teenagers painfully attempt to reconcile the competing demands of their multi-cultural selves.

The problematical articulation of cosmopolitan identities is not just confined to Smith's second-generation figures. Neena's drawing of parallels between Millat and his father is echoed a few pages later by an exchange between Samad and Alsana. As Samad laments the failure of his plan to instil traditional Muslim values in his sons, Alsana berates him: '[y]ou say we have no control, yet you always try to control everything!' (289). The irony of Samad's actions in England – clinging stubbornly to his sense of Islam as a ceding of control to Allah, despite his constant attempts to control the lives of those around him, alienates him and reduces him to a comical parody. Similarly Millat's flirtation with radical Islam, personified by his involvement with 'KEVIN' does not result in the respect he craves, and, rather than earning the admiration of his father, Samad rejects his son's fundamental politics and continues to view him as his 'good-for-nothing son' (286). Whilst the second generation 'can be said to possess a greater array of ethnic options than the parents' (Song 104), it is just this proclivity of choice which can in fact constrain second-generation subjects into patterns of unbelonging. In Millat's case, his attempt to resolve the competing claims to community represents the young Asians who, in sociologist Miri Song's analysis, 'resolve their dilemmas by working toward their own synthesis of Asian and British values and practices, rather than face an either/or situation' (107). However, in doing so Millat becomes an object of ridicule within his own family and peer group, and he dabbles in dangerous yet farcical fundamentalism in the form of KEVIN. Samad despairs that Millat is 'neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or



Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between, he lived up to his middle name, *Zulkifar*, the clashing of two swords' (351, emphasis in orig.). Millat is torn between two sets of constraints which appear to pull him in opposing directions. His is not a space of peace, but of the 'clash' of cultures and traditions. *White Teeth* problematises Song's characterisation of second-generation individual 'choice' of ethnic values, reiterating that at all times those choices are constrained by the realities of the communities with which the subject is interacting.

Millat's problematical interaction with KEVIN leads to himself and Irie coming into contact with the Chalfens: Josh, in their year at school, whose hopeless crush on Irie mirrors her unrequited love of the Iqbal brothers; Joyce, his horticulturalist mother; and Marcus, the genetic scientist whose obsession with "good genes" leads to the creation of FutureMouse, the genetically engineered creature through which the competing stories of Smith's patchwork of multiracial characters converge. Whilst Smith's portrayal of the Chalfens and their supercilious interest in Millat and Irie as "curiosities" can at times be characterised as scathing, it is through them that the cosmopolitanism of Smith's novel may be distilled. The Chalfens, a family who 'referred to themselves as nouns, verbs and occasionally adjectives' (314), present themselves as a unified, pure body, needing no outside forces on which to survive. Yet Joyce's work as a horticulturalist grafting plants together to make them stronger, along with her fierce interest in Millat, gesture towards the potential benefits of hybridity. As privileged intellectuals, Joyce and Marcus Chalfen are reminiscent of elite cosmopolitans, with the ability to interact with but not rely upon the communities around them. Smith's relentlessly satirical portrayal of Joyce's attempts to "save" Millat ultimately mocks the ability of such elitism to rise to the challenge of "hybrid" representations of contemporary multi-racial communities. In addition, Joyce's motivation for doing so is presented as self-serving, as, grasped with a millennial

ennui, she and her clan 'were bored. Like clones of each other, their dinner table was an exercise in mirrored perfection, Chalfenism and all its principles reflecting itself infinitely' (314). Unlike Irie, who desperately attempts to find a 'reflection' in English culture, and is subsequently brought closer to her Jamaican heritage, the Chalfens find in each other a perfect reflection of genetic superiority. Yet that symmetry, that 'mirrored perfection', leads to dissatisfaction and an overwhelming desire in Joyce and Josh to interact with the "other" in the form of multiracial Irie and fundamentalist-inclined Millat. Joyce's sense of her influence imitates Ulf Hannerz's representation of cosmopolitanism as a narcissistic enterprise wherein 'the willingness to become involved with the Other, and the concern with achieving competence in cultures which are initially alien, relate to considerations of self as well' (103). This competence, though, does not signal commitment: Joyce may embrace Millat, but she can disengage herself from him at any time. As Ashley Dawson has convincingly argued, Joyce's 'myopic support of Millat offers an implicit comment on the politics of institutional multiculturalism in Britain' (167), yet it is this conditional community offered by the Chalfens that allows Millat, Magid, and Irie to establish their own selfhood independent of their families, albeit still within a constricting structure. This being the case, the 'value [of] partial allegiances and unassimilated communities' (Walkowitz 10) offered by cosmopolitanism allows for the articulation of a multiracial identity, insofar as it frees the diasporic subject from the boundaries of their own rigidly defined communities. The teenagers, though, are not totally free of boundaries as they exchange one rigidly defined community for another: that of the insular and self-congratulatory Chalfenism.

Joyce and her ability to redefine strategies of cosmopolitanism are problematised by her interactions with Alsana and Clara. The three women do not find a common ground on which to come together during the course of the novel,

remaining in combative opposition to one another. Clara, on her visit to the Chalfens, is intimidated by the force of Joyce's pride, and fails to articulate her own sense of being a strong black woman, placing the reason for Irie's intellectual achievements at the door of her white great-grandfather, despite her own belief that he was a 'no good djam fool bwoy' (355) and leaves the Chalfens' home frustrated and angry at her inability to counteract Joyce's belief in genetic superiority. Alsana, on the other hand, identifies Joyce's meddling, what she calls 'involved', as the destructive legacy of white supremacy, a

consequence of living, a consequence of occupation and immigration, of empires and expansion, of living in each other's pockets... one becomes involved and it is a long trek back to being uninvolved.

(439)

Alsana's is an inherently pessimistic view of the legacies of colonialism which have resulted in the practices of life in modern multicultural Britain. Far from believing in the cosmopolitanism of Joyce's outlook, Alsana sees it as myopically disinterested in the realities of migration and diasporic influence – rather, she views Joyce as interested in only what Millat's exoticism can do for her, rather than a real interest in cultural exchange. To Alsana, the prospect of 'involvement' brings about the same feeling of fear that immobilises Clara, of being subsumed into an alien and hostile culture, assimilated beyond recognition.

This pessimistic view of the realities of multicultural living is also apparent in Smith's characterisation of fundamentalism, brought to farcical conclusion with Millat's attempted assassination of Dr Perret, that is complicated by the inclusion of Josh Chalfen, who has also travelled to the unveiling of the FutureMouse project with

the intention of destroying his father's life's work in the name of radical animal rights. Josh's inept but ultimately successful attempt to liberate the genetically modified mouse frees it from the constraint of its predetermined scientific future, and mirrors his own attempt to free himself from the constraints which his family's dedication to scientific rationalism places on him. Josh rejects the rational Chalfenism of his father in favour of radical liberalism, just as Magid rejects his father's belief in an all-powerful God in favour of supporting Marcus's heretical eugenics project. In refusing the expectations placed on them by their families, the two boys resist being 'assigned fixed places in predetermined segments' (Sen 165) which the cellular nature of contemporary multiculturalism supports. FutureMouse is a figure of absolute biological determinism, a being whose whole existence has been mapped out by its creators. The novel's closing scene, in which Archie watches '[FutureMouse] dash along the table, and through the hands of those who wished to pin it down' (542), allows for the possibility that FutureMouse, in escaping, can break free of the life it was created for, however briefly. Similarly, Magid, Millat, Irie and Josh, in their struggle against the expectations their families place upon them, may be able to resist the constraints of their own familial and diasporic communities, allowing the creation of inclusive, non-privileged cosmopolitan communities in the future. This opportunity represents the possibility of a future free of the constraints which Smith critiques in her representation of contemporary multiculturalism.

Ultimately, Smith's narrative fails to deliver a reconciled notion of contemporary English communities, but it is perhaps in this failure that an alternative template can be drawn. The policies of multiculturalism and community cohesion can be seen to have fallen short of their goal to unite communities across cultural divisions into a unified sense of Englishness, but it is conceivably these 'partial allegiances and unassimilated communities that for many constitute home' (Walkowitz 10) to which

multi-racial subjects should be aspiring. Smith herself has said that her generation is 'a generation obsessed with things which are indeterminate where you can't be certain of things' (Nasta 273), and this indeterminacy is reiterated throughout *White Teeth*, so that no formation of heritage or community emerges unscathed from Smith's satire. As a result, the identification of radical fundamentalism with conservative religious fervour is tempered by an equally radical and fundamentalist liberalism, rendering both radicalisations problematic and quasi farcical. It is my assertion, then, that *White Teeth* is a novel which ascribes no solutions to the problems faced by a multicultural community, but rather, attempts to posit an indeterminism of contemporary culture. The text moots a tentative cosmopolitanism concerned with the sharing of ideas and values across transient models of community and subjecthood. Subsequently the novel gestures towards contingent positionalities which recognise the impossibility of sustaining cellular lives.

In addition to *White Teeth* and *NW*, Smith continues to problematize multicultural London through her exploration of the specific locale of Willesden. The narrative of her recently published short story, *The Embassy of Cambodia* (2013), also presents a constrained cosmopolitanism which evidences the indeterminacy of the contemporary city space. *The Embassy of Cambodia* follows Fatou, an African migrant living with and working for a subcontinental Asian family in Willesden. Every Monday morning, while her employers are otherwise engaged, Fatou walks the mile from their house to the local health centre to swim. On her way to the swimming pool, Fatou passes the Cambodian embassy, inexplicably located in a former residential home in the suburb. Fatou is fascinated by the embassy, where a silent game of badminton appears to be in progress each time she passes, and from where no Cambodian ever seems to emerge, only young white travellers seeking visas. The

story deals artfully with a range of themes, including the complex routes of modern migrancy and the elitism of travel.

Fatou's story evidences the complex trajectories along which contemporary cosmopolitans travel. Originally from the Ivory Coast, she has arrived in London via Accra and Rome, travelling to Europe across the Mediterranean from Libya. She is an economic migrant, forced to travel in order to seek work and therefore her position is both economically and socially precarious. She problematizes the 'hierarchy of mobility' (Farrier 4) of contemporary migrants in her position as both legal (a European Union citizen) and extra-legal (in that she earns no wage and has no access to her own passport). She is fascinated with the Cambodian embassy and its incongruous position in Willesden. The embassy represents the 'incursions of sovereignty in the interstices' (Farrier 8), as a symbol of the nation state within the confines of the city space. However, the wall which surrounds and obscures the building fails to accommodate either Cambodians or Fatou. When Fatou does at last view a Cambodian woman leaving the grounds, she is startled at the woman's Sainsbury shopping bags, taken aback that the two women might do their food shopping at the same local store. The woman is a precursor to Fatou's own final traversal of Willesden, in which, lacking her own suitcase, she leaves the Derawals' with her belongings in an assortment of plastic bags. The narrator notes that

no doubt there are those who will be critical of the narrow, essentially local scope of Fatou's interest in the Cambodian woman from the Embassy of Cambodia, but we, the people of Willesden, have some sympathy with her attitude . . . Surely there is something to be said for drawing a circle around our attention and remaining within that circle. But how large should this circle be?

*(Embassy of Cambodia 23-24)*

Fatou and the unnamed Cambodian women are both interlopers in the city as both exist on the periphery of a society which denies them status. Smith acknowledges the comforting aspects of this prescribed worldview in the quotation above, but simultaneously problematizes it with the question ‘how large should this circle be?’ In other words, if it is more comfortable to exist within the confines of localised experience, how “local” can that experience be, in a cosmopolitan space such as London? The narrators ‘circles’ are reminiscent of Sen’s cellular monoculturalisms, and so the limitations of the local to account for the interstitial spaces of migration are evidenced. Indeed, the locale of Willesden itself is integral to the narrative. The only white British inhabitant with whom Fatou interacts is the girl behind the reception desk at the swimming pool. Her employers are Asian, her only friend Nigerian, and the only other people she has contact with are silent and unseen, behind the walls of the Embassy itself. In the centre of all this cosmopolitan contact, the restraint which Fatou places on herself to recognise only that which is local and knowable becomes both problematic and comforting. The last lines of the novella return to the unseen badminton players: ‘pock, smash. Pock, smash. As if one player could imagine only a violent conclusion and the other only a hopeful return’ (69). Fatou’s position of liminality in the contemporary city is evidenced by lack of agency – Fatou, in her forced migrations, is both deterritorialised and bound by the constraints of the city space.

Eleonore Kofman has argued that ‘the right to develop a cultural cosmopolitan sensibility based on mobility, multiple identities and contact with other places enjoyed by the privileged national is certainly not universal’ (251). This restriction of cosmopolitan trajectories is evidenced by Fatou’s precarious position of

indeterminacy in *The Embassy of Cambodia*, and also by Leah and her African husband Michel in *NW*. Economic as well as class-based restraints prevent them from articulating the transcultural ‘conversations’ which figures such as Appiah prioritise as inherently cosmopolitan. Nevertheless, in their place within the city, their locale of Willesden, they do interact daily with the ‘universal concern and respect for legitimate difference’ which, according to Appiah, denotes the challenge of cosmopolitanism (*Cosmopolitanism* xv). As I will argue in the proceeding pages, Smith’s narrative reflection of the problematic elitism of reified forms of cosmopolitanism gives rise to the articulation of an imperfect, constrained cosmopolitanism which nonetheless advances beyond the cellular confines of multiculturalism.

In 2004, Zadie Smith published a short story, ‘Hanwell in Hell’, in *The New Yorker*. This was subsequently included in the collection *Martha and Hanwell* (2005) as part of the Pocket Penguin series. The eponymous protagonist of ‘Hanwell in Hell’ is revealed to the reader through the reminiscences of the unnamed narrator, addressed in a letter to the man’s daughters upon his death. Remembered as an English everyman – ‘Men in England have looked like Hanwell since the days of King Raedwald’ (‘Hanwell in Hell’ 41) – the tragic figure of Hanwell longs for the daughters he has left behind in another city, although ‘he knew all the time you and your sisters wouldn’t come, or that he didn’t want you to’ (49). Set in Bristol in the mid-twentieth century, the story foreshadows Smith’s use of the city space as a harbinger of brutality, and a place where each individual is detached from the other by their respective experiences of city life. Hanwell and the narrator have both come to Bristol to escape their pasts, and find themselves navigating a claustrophobic, dark city space. The action of the story takes place over the course of one rainy night, as they first meet in a restaurant and then traverse the streets to Hanwell’s small apartment. The narrator is enraged as they travel through a gentrified area of the town, past ‘beautiful Georgian



properties looming white and expensive overhead' (37). Having just lost a home similar to the ones he is passing, he 'wanted people to have the kind of bad luck I now knew existed. I didn't want anyone to think that what happened to me couldn't happen to them' (37). Whilst the narrator is disillusioned as the once accessible privilege of wealth and status is now denied to him, Hanwell maintains 'a beautiful way of hoping' (49) which allows him to appreciate the good fortune of those surrounding him. However, like the twenty-first century Britons depicted in Smith's 2012 novel *NW*, both the narrator and Hanwell struggle to adapt to the changing economies around them. The narrator reacts with anger to his changed economic circumstances, and Hanwell obstinately hopes for a return to a family life that will never be recovered. The failure to adapt leads the two men to journey dangerously through the claustrophobic urban landscape, and ultimately to remain suspended on the outskirts of the city space in which they reside. The fatality of the urban space is echoed in *NW* as the characters of Felix and Natalie attempt to wishfully traverse the urban city without regard to the dangers of boundary crossings, echoing the wilful hopefulness of Hanwell and his eventual failure to reinstate himself in the life of the city.

In order to examine Smith's use of the cityscape to envision the everyday cultural and economic realities of cosmopolitan living, let me frame the discussion with reference to a range of conceptualisations of the economies of race and class and the geographic and economic suspension lived in the everyday spaces of twenty-first century cities. In examining class from a perspective of deracialised articulations of economic status, I refer to Étienne Balibar's position that

social relations are not established *between* hermetically closed classes, but that they are formed *across* classes – including the working class – or alternatively that *class struggle takes place within classes themselves*.

(Balibar & Wallerstein 163, emphasis in orig.)

Balibar articulates the need to recognise the multifaceted nature of particular social classes, and the importance therefore of not universalising the experience within one class group. The struggle of working class characters to adapt to a globalised capitalist culture is communicated throughout the narrative of *NW*. As Smith's characters aspire to move up the social and economic ladder of twenty-first century Britain, they struggle not only with their own pasts but also with the complexity of traversing multiple economic and geographic locations simultaneously. The 'endless transformation of the identity of social classes' (Balibar & Wallerstein 168) is predicated upon the willingness of the social players to exist across boundaries of accepted behaviour and taste. In so doing, they strive to retain familial and friendship links whilst attempting to articulate a new and "improved" socio-economic identity. It is this conceptual boundary traversal which leads to geographical danger in Smith's novel, as her characters' lives become suspended amidst a hostile and at times dangerous urban landscape. In the contemporary world of *NW*, the working classes are no longer prevented from 'coming to a common consciousness of class by intruding that other consciousness of race' (Sivanandan 350). On the contrary, divisions are between those who are aspirational and those who are not, as shown through the social-climbing Natalie's interactions with her family and with her childhood friend Leah. In Smith's multicultural city, the 'horizontal conflict of classes' is no longer prevented by the 'vertical integration of race' (Sivanandan 350), and so exploitation becomes an economically motivated class distinction, something which exists beyond racial boundaries.

In order to develop my reading of Smith's novel as an envisioning of the everyday cosmopolitanism of the city, I turn to John Clayton's recent study of

everyday geographies in the multicultural city of Leicester.<sup>23</sup> Applying Clayton's analysis to the London of *NW* reveals that in the contemporary British city, the interaction of ethnic and racial groups is predicated under the auspices of class. These interactions can differ depending upon the economic and cultural background of the particular urban locale, whilst also retaining universal features of contemporary cosmopolitan space. Clayton concludes that in the particular case of Leicester, 'the manner in which multiculturalism is promoted in this place as a form of middle-class cosmopolitanism where diversity is deemed attractive on certain economic and cultural terms' exacerbates the difficulties experienced when addressing interethnic relations 'for those living on the margins in raced and classed terms' (258). As in London, where the affluence of certain wealthy pockets of the city compound the sense of isolation felt by the masses feeling the effect of post-crash austerity, his exploration of racial tensions running beneath the surface of the seemingly 'peaceful coexistence of communities' (257) of Leicester establishes that the geographies of race in British cities remain complex and predicated upon particular classed experience. Clayton's racial cartography of the city posits that the movement of 'a middle-class self-supporting African-Asian population from East Africa in the early 1970s' (257) assisted in the transition of the predominately white English city to a vibrant multicultural economy. "White flight", he theorises, was halted by the contribution which these well-educated, self-supporting migrants made to the local economy, and by the absence of an established and formalised far-right political agenda. Yet the focus on the "good migrant's" ability to adapt and contribute to the socio-economic needs of the city leads to a more insidious class resentment of

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<sup>23</sup> Clayton's study, 'Everyday Geographies of Marginality and Encounter in the Multicultural City', was published in the collection *New Geographies of Race and Racism* (2008), edited by Claire Dwyer and Caroline Bressey.

contemporary migration, which has predominantly been of the economically and socially unstable class of refugees and asylum seekers. One of Clayton's subjects, an unemployed white working class male, blames his own difficulty in finding unskilled work on the willingness of these migrants to work illegally for less than minimum wage. Rather than identifying the systems which exploit both groups,

for people like himself who see themselves in positions of marginality, lacking adequate access to work opportunities; they are adversely affected by the presence of racially marked new arrivals to the city (in the guise of "asylum seekers" and "Somalians"). Multiculturalism, in this way, is seen as something which does not contribute to quality of life, as in cosmopolitan definitions of "the good multicultural city" but are seen to take away.

(260)

This positioning of contemporary migrancy as interloping upon existing patterns of generational migration and replacing it with economic migration which threatens the stability of mixed communities in the city gestures towards the increased racial pressures associated with the recent politics of economic austerity measures. In reaction to these economic pressures, the tensions raised by the competing demands of low economic status become delineated along racial lines. The aspirations of cosmopolitanism as a form of 'universalism plus difference' (Appiah 'Cosmopolitan Reading' 202) then come under threat through the presence of racially inflected socio-economic statuses. In other words, no matter how fluid the perceived boundaries between separate racial and ethnic groups, the endeavour towards cosmopolitan community is hindered by the delicate balance of economic class tensions that have been complicated by the transnational movement of labour and migrant dispersion.

At the same time, the idea of the cosmopolitan city has ‘become sedimented in the discourses of the public sphere’ (Binnie et. al. 3), so that the dialogues of race and economic class have become intertwined in the contemporary imagination. There remains a suggestion that low socio-economic standing can contribute to the racialised and racist attitudes within particular ethnic groups and communities. In contemporary articulations of race and class, this struggle is played out across urban boundaries of economic spaces. With *NW*, Smith examines class from within a black British frame, and so reconfigures it within the narrative concerns of black British writing. *NW* refutes Clayton’s analysis that ‘cultures of exclusion . . . are also related to the everyday reality of living with difference, shared space and the possibility of inter-ethnic encounter’ (261), and showcases the possibilities contained in inclusive rather than exclusive encounter. Smith’s characters repeatedly configure connections across racial lines in order to navigate the complex classed existence of an increasingly gentrified society. These connections all point towards an experience of everyday cosmopolitanism that maps itself beyond simple racial or ethnic boundaries.

In this sense, viewing classed interactions in the city through a cosmopolitan lens ‘can liberate us to pursue a long-term process of trans-local connecting’ (Robbins *Secular Vocations* 196). Rather than splitting into the cellular communities of difference defined by race which I identified in *White Teeth*, the inhabitants of *NW* stratify themselves in economic and classed terms in order to navigate the multifaceted geographies of the city. Seemingly socially free in a way that previous generations have not been, these characters are ultimately constrained by societal expectations of social and economic outlay. As Bruce Robbins has explained,

[t]he interest of the term cosmopolitanism is located, then, not in its full theoretical extension, where it becomes a paranoid fantasy of ubiquity and

omniscience, but rather (paradoxically) in its local applications, where the unrealizable ideal produces normative pressure against such alternatives as, say, the fashionable “hybridization”. Its provocative association with privilege is perhaps better understood in this context, as the normative edge that cosmopolitanism tries to add to the inclusiveness and diversity of multiculturalism – as an attempt to name a necessary but difficult normativeness.

*(Secular Vocations 195-6)*

It is this relocation of the cosmopolitan within normative spheres of the everyday local experience that I pursue with my reading of *NW*. Smith’s communities are constrained by localised spheres of influence, but within these localised spheres comes the opportunity to exist on a transformative global economic and social level through the transnational interaction of migrant individuals and contemporary consumer culture. Hence cosmopolitanism is established as locally derived, allowing the everyday inhabitants to aspire to more rarified and globalised cultural identity. As James Procter has noted, ‘the local persists in the contemporary national imaginary as a taken-for-granted site “beyond” the diasporic multicultural of England’s larger cosmopolitan centres’ (72). By relocating cosmopolitanism within the everyday sphere, the local becomes embedded within rather than existing without the communities contained in urban multicultures. However, I argue that it is the psychological failure of individual attempts to transcend constrained boundaries of influence and open up spaces of mobility and fluidity that leads to the “suspended cosmopolitanism” which my reading of the novel locates.

*NW* exposes the tensions of modern multicultural communities as they strive towards cosmopolitanism only to be hindered by the realities of contemporary socio-

economic systems. I am interested in investigating Smith's text through her use of the city space to 'generate an understanding of how these key issues of class, commodification and the everyday intersect with, produce and reveal the attitudes and practices of cosmopolitanism' (Binnie et. al. 13). Smith's text conceptualises the multiple and yet individualised "spaces" of London, and the dangers of traversing those spaces. Felix's crossing of the boundaries between NW and W1 leads to the fatal knife attack perpetrated against him; Leah's refusal to extend her sphere of influence beyond the shadow of her former tower block home stymies her relationship with the Francophone African migrant Michel; and Natalie's sexualised journeying through the city's spaces acting out her fantasies of self-expression lead to the crisis point of her hitherto careful self-construction. Increasingly in cosmopolitan societies, 'consumption as a criterion for cultural membership' (Lamont 7) replaces universal humanism as a strategy for bridging the boundaries of racial or social difference. Through both the structure and the form of the novel, Smith highlights the problematic intersection of the everyday lived reality of the contemporary cosmopolitan city with the economic aspirations of twenty-first-century classed experience.

As previously noted, *NW* returns Smith to the suburb of Willesden in northwest London, also the setting of her debut novel, *White Teeth*. The novel concerns itself with the contemporary navigation of urban cosmopolitan space against a backdrop of socio-economic boom and bust through the concurrent narratives of three former tower block residents: Leah Hanwell, Natalie Blake (formerly known as Keisha), and Felix Cooper. Smith has commented that by revisiting Willesden in the novel, the particular locality of her youth, she wanted to establish the context within which one experiences wider global culture, rooting the global firmly within the local as the location of the tools with which one builds a own particular worldview. This concern is displayed early on within the narrative, as black British Natalie observes

of her Italo-Trinidadian husband, 'he was from a different slice of the multiverse' (NW 53). Smith's 'multiverse' (or "multicultural universe") expands from the local NW postcode across to Italy and Francophone Africa with the inclusion of the protagonists' husbands, Francesco (Frank) and Michel, married to Natalie's white best friend, Leah. As these four characters attempt to navigate the globalised economic landscape, Leah and Natalie represent the local, having left Willesden briefly for university but then returned to their childhood neighbourhood, and profoundly unwilling to venture beyond their particular experience of the city.

Around this diverse cast of protagonists, Smith builds a complex formal narrative structured across five sections: 'Visitation', 'Guest', 'Host', 'Crossing', and a final section also entitled 'Visitation'. Each narrative section concerns the action taking place in the life of one of the protagonists, with some overlapping and reshaping of events from multiple viewpoints. In addition to the complex, overlapping style of the narrative, the linking of the final section with the opening centralises the narrative around Leah and Natalie, and returns the narrative to an omniscient presence which serves to distance the women from the action taking place around them. Each section also includes recurring motifs: Felix's narrative is marked by chapter headings which denote his place in the city at the time of the action, by use of the postcodes NW6 (Willesden) and W1 (Westminster), underpinning the coding of London according to specific geographic space. The difficulties that Felix encounters on his journey through these spaces reinforce the sense of dislocation to be found in the cosmopolitan city. Leah's narratives utilise the recurring theme of the number 37. As well as '37' titling four chapters, Leah catches the 37 bus, and finds the drug-addict Shar, who she has become obsessed with, in a squat at 37 Ridley Avenue on page 37 of the novel. The number 37 is also prominent later on in Natalie's narrative, where it is omitted from the numbered vignettes composing her story, and coincides with a



recounting of the parentally enforced “break” in the women’s friendship at the crucial age of sixteen. Many reviewers of *NW* have tried to account for the prominence of this seemingly innocuous number 37. Aside from the fact that it was the author’s age at the time of publication, Christian Lorentzen has speculated that it is ‘the number, according to Wikipedia, that most people pick when asked to name a random number between 0 and 100’ (21). Given the additional narrative interest in contemporary social networking and internet lives, to be discussed presently, and Smith’s own insistence on her right to speak for her childhood neighbourhood despite her increasing wealth and relocation to New York, the formal obsession with ‘37’ can either be read as a deliberate enigma, or an authorial indulgence signifying the textual journey to the home space of northwest London.

Just as Smith’s novel *On Beauty* (2005) pays homage to E.M. Forster, *NW*’s literary patron and guiding influence appears to be David Foster Wallace, about whom she has written critically, and whom she references in the epigraph to her recent essay collection, *Changing My Mind* (2009). Writing about Foster Wallace in that collection, Smith asserts that his work

was meant for readers of my generation, born under the star of four interlocking revolutions . . . the ubiquity of television, the voraciousness of late capitalism, the triumph of therapeutic discourse, and philosophy’s demotion into a branch of linguistics. How to be finely aware when you are trained in passivity? How to detect real value when everything has its price? How to be responsible when you are, by definition, always the child victim? How to be in the world when the world has collapsed into language?

(‘Brief Interviews’ 283)

Disregarding the hyperbole of this lengthy quotation, the concerns that Smith identifies in Foster Wallace's work are also addressed by the narrative form and discourses of *NW*. By imposing a different formal style and experimenting with stream-of-consciousness, visualised texts (text forming the shape of the thing described), and vignettes, in each section of the novel Smith alludes to the highly experimental way in which Foster Wallace played with contemporary expectations of narrative and form by the reader. In addition, Smith's narrative preoccupation with moral, economic, and class 'value' and 'responsibility' – the contradictory values of aspiring to the middle-class consumer culture whilst attempting to locate oneself in the territorial space of the economically disadvantaged, and the need to take responsibility for one's own actions and the reactions they engender – are central to the novel. The link between these concerns and the suspended cosmopolitanism which I identify in Smith's rendering of contemporary London and its city spaces will be the main focus of my interrogation of the text.

David Marcus has also linked *NW* to Foster Wallace and other contemporaneous American writers such as Don DeLillo, writing that Smith and her contemporaries seek 'to rebuild the world rather than deconstruct it' (67). According to Marcus, *NW* 'boldly returns to the metafictional and maximalist experiments' of *White Teeth* (69), as it 'seeks to render not only the cognitive disorder of postmodern experience but also the social and psychological disorders of postmodern – that is, post-welfare state – capitalism' (70). He also highlights Smith's position as a writer acutely aware of her literary forebears, as can be evidenced by her critical work released between each fictional publication. Whilst I concur with Marcus regarding *NW*'s use of formal experimentation to contextualise the immobility of class and geographical space, I disagree that her novel works towards a "social realism" more reminiscent of Theodore Dreiser than David Foster Wallace. While the novel is

preoccupied with social values and attainment of both status and wealth, it problematises that social realism with its formal experimentation and ultimate lack of clear, moralistic resolution to the social realities of the narrative.

In *NW*, the contemporary concerns of race, class and commodity are intersected with everyday cosmopolitanism as evidenced in the simultaneously familiar and alien geographical spaces which the characters attempt to traverse. As Europe's 'urban multiculturalisms are now accused of transforming its major cities into geographies of strangeness, cultural unfamiliarity, and national risk', the London of *NW* is emblematic of the difficulty of attempts to build a middle-class cosmopolitan aesthetic in these newly alienated city spaces (Hesse 291). Through both the structure and the narrative of the novel, the importance of the intersection of the everyday lived reality of the contemporary city with the aspirations of cosmopolitanism is highlighted and investigated. In order to extrapolate the themes of economic and geographic suspension, and a new, twenty-first century articulation of race and class within these boundaries, I will focus on several key moments in the text. I will centre my discussion around the five central players in the novel, turning first to Felix's geographical and classed exploration of the city space, and his interactions with the intern Tom and his aging ex-lover, Annie. I will then widen this gaze towards localised spheres to include the contemporary influence of the global economy, investigating the two couples, Natalie and Frank and Leah and Michel, as representatives of contemporary aspiration and constraint. I will explore Natalie's tragic foray into sexual commoditisation, and the way in which current use of the internet opens up spaces for boundary crossing which does not necessarily communicate or facilitate shared experience, and which, like Felix's more conventional city crossings, leads to tragedy. In doing so, I will show that the narrative articulates a fatal geography of cosmopolitanism suspended in the contemporary city space.

Smith first explores the city as a locale of disconnected and dangerous spheres of influence through the flaneurship of Felix. Rather than being an elitist global flaneur, Felix's working class, localised wanderings are involved in a reclaiming of transcultural movement. As the narrative follows Felix's progress on one Saturday, he first travels to Westminster in order to complete a business deal with Tom, a young, gentrified male who seems naive about his own place within the city, and then onwards to Soho, where he reconnects briefly with his ex-lover, the aging faux-aristocrat, Annie. Felix, a twenty seven year-old recovering alcoholic with two pre-teen children and a host of money-making schemes behind him, is adept at navigating the complex spaces of the twenty-first century city, but finds himself at times wrong-footed by the social expectations of Tom and Annie, who while of a higher social standing are far less worldly and self-sufficient than Felix. When Felix meets Tom, a young university graduate who has placed an ad to sell the classic MG which was a gift from his father, Tom 'laugh[s] as a way of covering his surprise. Felix did not know why his own voice so often misled on the phone (104). This confusion over Felix's race and background, based upon the expectation that a tower block dweller would not be interested in nor have the resources for a classic car, puts Tom at a disadvantage during their initial negotiations for the MG. This is further compounded by Tom's own lack of knowledge, and he becomes a parody of an ineffectual toff, as with his 'chestnut fringe flopping in his face' (104) he 'blushe[s] appealingly' (108) throughout the negotiations to cover his inexperience and lack of confidence in the venture. Felix, despite his economic disadvantage, has the upper hand in the transaction as he is aware of the value not only of the MG, but also of his own skills as a qualified mechanic. Felix views the acquisition of the car not as a status symbol, but something to represent how far he has travelled as he moves forward from addiction and unstable income into a new life with a steady job and his girlfriend,

Grace. With this purchase, the value of the MG transforms from commodity to signifier. The signification of the old car, however, is nullified by Felix's premature death, as he is killed before being able to share his acquisition.

Felix then visits his ex-lover Annie in Soho. Annie functions as a symbol of faded English aristocracy: 'her great uncle, the Earl, owned the ground, beneath this building, beneath every building on the street the theatre, the coffee houses, the McDonald's' (126). Such a legacy of wealth and status literally underpins the commercial running of the capital. Yet Annie herself lives in squalor, a 'grimy sameness' (121) necessitated by lack of economic capital and her addictions. Her gentrified family may be land-rich, but in the new global economy they are cash-poor, and so despite her apartment having 'the best view in town' (130) towards Buckingham Palace, she lives on the edges of society, closeted in the few rooms of her apartment, and refusing to venture out in a London she is removed from both socially and geographically. On entering Annie's home for the first time in some months, Felix observes that here 'a large life [was] contracted into a small space . . . the sense of suffocation and impatience was identical, the longing he had to be free' (122). This 'sense of suffocation', though, is not Annie's, as she is seemingly content within her circumscribed urban locale. It is Felix who feels claustrophobic in her presence, who longs to slough off her influence and move forward towards the life he intends. Felix may be an outsider to Annie and Tom's social conditions, but he does not experience the life of the city as an outsider. He traverses the city with confidence and finds a comfortable, if at times ill-fitting, discourse with the pair. Unlike Leah and Natalie, Felix does not aspire to climb the social hierarchy of London, or to participate in the grab towards material goods and properties. He is content rather to challenge London in an attempt to revalue the city space with a particular sense of moral responsibility. Felix's name stems from the Latin root *felic* (meaning happy), but his

attempt to return to a state of happiness by following his twelve step recovery programme and make amends with Annie are revealed to be in vain. Later, Natalie declares that happiness is ‘not an absolute value’ but a ‘state of comparison’ (220), tied intrinsically to the status of others rather than to an inner sense of wellbeing or stability. Felix’s contravention of this materialistic attitude with the value placed in the morality of one’s actions ultimately fails to secure his place in the city. On the return from his journey to confront responsibility, the dangers of boundary crossing are revealed, and Smith’s pessimistic cosmopolitanism returns.

Felix’s comfortable confidence in traversing both social and geographical city spaces is suspended by his murder at the hands of two young men ‘not much taller than he was. Not much wider, either’ (147) upon his return to the familiar streets of Willesden. Felix understands the shared social background of the men who attack him, and even in the midst of the attack recalls ‘when being the big man was all that mattered’ (148). The implication is that Felix can empathise with the position of the two men. Perhaps he even attempted similar thefts when in the grip of his own addiction. He is stabbed due to his refusal to give the men his two cubic zirconia earrings, but, again, this refusal is not motivated by any need on Felix’s part for status or objects. Rather, he refuses to relinquish the gems because they are a gift from his girlfriend. Alberto Fernandez Carbajal, in his reading of *NW*, argues that Felix’s stabbing ‘was not racially motivated . . . but belongs to a narrative of black empowerment and social stigmatization that creates a gap between Felix and his murderers’, and that as such his killing reveals ‘the racially segregated social system driving these youths to violence’ (Carbajal 12). Felix’s death is indicative of the constraints of the contemporary city, but these constraints are depicted as socio-economic rather than racial. His attempts to move forward from the economic deprivations of the past by claiming a social interaction with the city spaces is

disqualified as he is ultimately deprived of his ability to further influence and interact with the urban landscape. Chillingly, the space which is most dangerous to Felix is not the alien landscape of Soho or Westminster, but the familiar territory of Willesden, where his journey both begins and ends. In the violent end to his journey, his moral upward mobility is suspended by the fatal intentions of his peers.

Felix, in his moral stand against acquisition, greed, and status, functions as a counterpoint to the grasping attitude of Natalie. Unlike Felix's non-valued acquisition of goods, Natalie and her husband Frank base their class boundary-crossing relationship on their joint aspiration to acquire status and wealth. As is established in the everyday language of a newspaper singles advertisement, they are brought together through Natalie's wish for the mutual advantages of class advancement:

[l]ow status person with intellectual capital but no surplus wealth [Natalie] seeks high-status person of substantial surplus wealth [Frank] for enjoyment of mutual advantages, including longer life expectancy, better nutrition, fewer working hours and early retirement, among other benefits.

(199)

Natalie's intentions in pursuing Frank are exposed through this ironic vocabulary. This is not simply a love match, but a calculated attempt to escape her working-class background and emerge into the comfortable middle classes, and all the benefits she believes that will entail. Desperate to slough off her former identity of Keisha from the council estate, Natalie goes through a slow process of transformation which culminates in a new name, a University degree, and a profession. Yet as the narrative progresses, Smith reveals that it is not just Natalie who struggles with insecurity and requires an established social identity. Frank, who looks 'like he was born on a yacht

somewhere in the Caribbean and raised by Ralph Lauren' (13), was raised in Italy by a single mother and sent to England for prep school as a young, non-English speaking child. The experience of being the only black man in a white family, and the only black Italian in an English school, has indelibly marked him as an outsider. Far from being the "African prince" of University rumour, he confesses to Natalie that his father was a Trinidadian train conductor with whom his mother had a brief fling in London. So it is revealed that the exotic Francesco de Angelis 'should be "Frank Harris"' (194). This hidden fact lies behind his need to prove himself on the professional and personal stage – professionally, by joining the newly minted class of hedge fund managers – and personally, by marrying the beautiful and talented Natalie. Both partners believe that 'life was a problem that could be solved by means of professionalization' (177), and their relationship is marked by a need to escape their respective pasts and build a new, middle-class life together, full of the values which are encapsulated by the rising classes. Their life together is one of purchase: a new home on the green, a smartphone, a luxury picnic hamper – anything to mark their lives as valuable. These acquisitions of both commodities and classed lifestyle are reminiscent of theories of mobility, in which contemporary 'flows and fluidity of goods and people have replaced the traditional bourgeois attachment to fixity' (Kofman 247). In the breakdown of the De Angelis's marriage the narrative indexes the failure of individuals to successfully navigate these flows.

Despite Natalie's genteel new lifestyle, played out in their large Victorian home during extravagant dinner parties, she remains tied to the geographical location of her former life, by purchasing a home within sight of her former tower block. In placing Natalie in this geographic constraint Smith highlights the preoccupation of the upwardly mobile with not forgetting where one has come from, and highlights the idea, explored so thoroughly in *White Teeth*, that the past cannot be completely



detached from the present. Bruce Robbins has written extensively on the overlapping allegiances of contemporary cosmopolitanism, and it is worth extrapolating his thesis that 'local belonging . . . offers no escape from [normative] cosmopolitanism' here (*Perpetual War* 27). Robbins argues that

[i]f the paradox of cosmopolitanism as multiple and overlapping belonging has become familiar, it is because, paradoxical or not, there is more and more historical evidence that such attachment can and does generate forms of detachment.

(*Perpetual War* 17-18)

This detachment is wittily represented in the text by Natalie and Frank's expensive detached home, setting them apart once and for all from their economically deprived neighbours. The complexity of their overlapping and contradictory spheres of influence goes unacknowledged, and leads to a profound status anxiety, as when Natalie plans a picnic with her friends Leah and Michel, who themselves are content in their working-class status,

[s]he set about planning it meticulously. She determined upon a hamper with real crockery and glasses. Even as she was ordering this stuff online she saw it was really 'too much', but her course was set and she felt unable to change direction . . . Who was it for?

(225-6)

Natalie's pathological need to impress her oldest and closest friend reveals the instability of her attempts to traverse multiple locations of belonging. Rather than her

socio-economic mobility allowing her freedom and access, she is instead constrained by the expectations of both spheres of influence. She believes that in order to solidify her new position of economic superiority, she must flaunt it with the acquisition of luxury goods and services. Paradoxically, she chooses an audience for these goods – her best friend Leah and husband Michel - who do not appreciate her efforts and feel profoundly uncomfortable in the face of her newly acquired status, which works to disconnect her from them.

Natalie's childhood friend Leah is the grounding force within Smith's multifarious narrative. Her empathy and attachment to the Indian drug addict Shar, her fierce loyalty to her migrant husband Michel, and her bond with Natalie are all oriented towards an experience of everyday cosmopolitanism that maps itself beyond simple racial or ethnic boundaries. As has been previously discussed, Leah's narrative is marked by the repetition of key motifs, most ambiguously the recurrence of the number 37. The indistinct meaning behind this motif acts as a demythologizing agent within the narrative, and as such it brings clarity to Leah's perception of herself as someone to whom things happen, and subtly critiques the 'inability to recognise one's own contingency' to which both Leah and Natalie fall prey (Webb np). Leah and Michel, in their friendship with Natalie and Frank, have fallen into the role of 'provid[ing] something like local colour' (*NW* 75) at the couple's dinner parties, regardless of Natalie and Leah's shared socio-economic background. Natalie's marriage to a man of means and her immersion in a respected profession indicates that she exists on a higher social stratum than Leah, 'a state-school wild card, with no Latin, Greek, no maths, no foreign language' (28). Natalie may feel insecure because her newly found status is predicated upon her "marrying up", but Leah's volatility rests on economic pressure, rather than social instability. Despite feeling socially secure within her own circle of influence (the Kilburn estate), Leah's humanities

degree leaves her ill-equipped for the working economy of the City, and her marriage to Francophone African Michel, and unwillingness to become pregnant, is seen as an affront to the black British women she works alongside, separating her from their social set. Despite their marriage being based on an equality of background and outlook, Leah and Michel find themselves struggling to participate as equals with the bankers and lawyers of the de Angelis “set”, as their lives become ‘[o]ffered to the table for general dissection, these anecdotes tak[ing] on their own life, separate, impressive’ (75). In this way Leah finds her own life becoming fodder for comfortable middle-class pontificating on the state of multiculturalism and the city, without being able to articulate her own sense of the spaces she inhabits. Through the anchoring of Leah’s experience of London’s “multiverse” within the narrative, Smith opens up a space to investigate the competing demands of constraint within a society predicated on freedom of choice and expression.

As Leah rejects gentrification for the stability of the familiar, Natalie in her turn pursues a perverse need to reject her working-class background in favour of professionalisation and acquisition of goods. That she also insists upon remaining located within the sphere of influence of her former self (living within sight of her mother’s council estate flat) leads to a psychological splitting. As she becomes further embedded in her wealthy lifestyle – purchasing not just luxury goods, but also with the luxury of home childcare and the status that implies – she begins to retreat further into a construct of an identity she might have become. In creating an online sexual persona, dressing in stereotypically ‘urban’ clothing and renaming that persona Keisha, Natalie attempts to reattach herself to her past. As she plays out the fantasy of once more becoming Keisha, she recklessly visits various sites around the city, seeking a sexual encounter which will counteract the detachment of her current milieu. However the sense of fulfilment she seeks in being ‘what everybody was looking for’

(230) is increasingly frustrating and dissatisfying. Utilising the freedom of anonymity that the internet establishes, she reconstructs a facade around her former self, but this is revealed to be a false sense of her own freedom, as ultimately she cannot escape the constraints of her role as a wife and mother. By commoditising herself into a sexual article and advertising that commodity over the internet, she enters a dangerous space which, rather than allowing her to traverse the multiple sites of social and geographical belonging, enforce a code of behaviour that locate her firmly back within the competing influences of both Natalie *and* of Keisha. The commoditisation of self, like the commoditization of things, then 'lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural and social factors' (Appadurai 15). In other words, Natalie herself becomes a thing attached to the value which is placed on her own body, and as such the possibility of a cosmopolitanism of multiple attachment becomes reliant on consumption rather than acquisition. The failure of this consumption to fulfil either Natalie or Keisha's desires results in the dissolution of the cultural intersections Natalie has worked so hard to acquire.

*NW* presents itself as a 'challenging, riskily open book, exhibiting all the novel's defiant possibilities; a freedom that stands in instructive contrast to *NW*'s trapped inhabitants' (Webb np). Smith's protagonists, who function within a contemporary society which prides itself on freedom of movement and mobility, ultimately find themselves constrained by the expectations of wants and behaviours that that free society places on them. To this end Natalie's conspicuous consumption of luxury goods reflects but also undermines financial stability, Leah's social status of wife is undermined as she rejects motherhood and Felix is not, as he thinks, free to move independently across city spaces. If Felix, Natalie and Leah are all inhibited by the everyday realities of the cosmopolitan city, then Natalie's eventual fall from privilege is symptomatic of the same forces which lead the university-educated Leah

into a poorly paid public sector role and which prevent Felix from traversing the city streets unscathed. This difficulty of movement and inability to transcend both social and spatial boundaries reflect the suspension of contemporary cosmopolitanism, which struggles to free itself from the rhetoric of the “multiverse”. This suspension is reflected in the narrative by the fatal geographies which the protagonists eventually grapple with, the breakdown of the women’s marriages, and Felix’s sudden and violent death. It is through this concept of suspended cosmopolitanism that the complexity of Smith’s narrative can be accessed and interpreted, as she narrates the socio-economic influence of the urban environment, and how the locales of strangeness with which Felix, Natalie and Leah collide and combine to create a city of brutal unfamiliarity. Smith’s London is indeed a space of cosmopolitanism suspended, where the articulation of everyday cosmopolitanism is inhibited by the estrangement and detachment which the individual faces within the community.

Writing in 2011, Robert Spencer contended that ‘cosmopolitanism does not yet exist, or at least [...] it exists in distorted or at any rate incomplete forms’ (3), and argued that it needs to be approached as ‘a process not a finished vision’ (13). This imperfect, in some ways illusory cosmopolitanism is evidenced by my reading of Smith’s novels. The work interrogated in this chapter foregrounds the localised area of Willesden, an emphasis which is most clearly denoted in *NW*’s title (reflecting as it does Willesden’s postcode designation). That Smith is evolving her interest in the specifically local ramifications of global trajectories which began with *White Teeth* is reflected in the circumscribed, perilous multiverse of *NW*. This evolution has come about during the period of ‘widespread unease about *multiculturalism* as a concept’, and is reflective of the shifting landscape of contemporary cosmopolitanism (McDonald 370, emphasis in orig.). The texts examined exemplify a localised cosmopolitan outlook which rejects the narrow confines of anti-racist

multiculturalism in favour of plural communities. However, in *White Teeth* this attempt at a local cosmopolitanism results in further constraint as Smith's characters struggle to realign themselves with plural subjectivities, and instead return to familiar cells of influence. Similarly, in *NW*, the protagonists attempts to circumnavigate the multicultural spaces of the city result in a suspended cosmopolitanism as the city fails to accommodate their plural selves. Recognising that these attempts are incomplete, and that they lead to a cosmopolitanism of constraint, enables a reading of the texts that permits a more nuanced iteration of transcultural communities than Smith has been previously credited with.

## Chapter Three

### Multi-Locational Cosmopolitanism in the novels of Diana Evans

‘Felix looked closely. Garvey House spilled out into the concrete backyard. Kids barefoot, parents looking like kids themselves. Afros, headscarves, cane rows, weird stiff wigs, a tall, skinny spiritual-looking Rasta resting on a big stick. He could not be sure if he had a memory of this, or whether the photograph itself was creating the memory for him. . . . Strange to see here, confirmed in black and white, what he had all his life assumed to be a self-serving exaggeration.’

(*NW* 93)

As I have argued, Zadie Smith’s Willesden novels present a vision of cosmopolitanism as constrained within and suspended by localised spheres of influence. Smith’s vignette regarding ‘Garvey House’, a place central to protagonist Felix’s childhood, in her novel *NW* (2012) ties the narrative to received black British political histories. Garvey House, a council house in which ‘Brother Raymond’ brings together the otherwise homeless under the auspices of the Black Power movement, is representative of the concrete locations of normative black British genealogies. Yet in some ways Felix also rejects this genealogy, dismissing his father’s obsessive memorialisation of Garvey House as ‘self-serving exaggeration’. Lloyd, an ageing, marijuana-smoking Rasta living in a run-down council high-rise, remembers his time immersed in black British politics as a “golden age” of black British aesthetics, when “we was fresh!” (*NW* 93) despite lack of money or opportunity. But for all this self-aggrandising vision of the historical resonances of black political movements, the House disbanded after only ‘nine months, two weeks, three days’ (*NW* 94), and the

singular legacy of the social experiment is a photo-book available to purchase for twenty-nine pounds. Lloyd himself has failed to use the experience to build a legacy of his own, as the narrative depicts him as socially isolated and dependent on his son's financial hand-outs. Smith's displacement of a black British genealogy which can be traced back to its political roots is evidenced in the narrative's detour into Lloyd and Felix's past. In contrast to Smith's work, I turn now to the two novels of the British-Nigerian author Diana Evans, whose narratives, I argue, broaden the scope of black British plurality in non-normative, multi-locational ways. The novels investigated here posit another alternative genealogy of black British aesthetics, one which looks to artistic endeavour for its points of orientation, rather than black British politics or normative histories. As my reading will show, the models of cosmopolitanism rendered by Evans are both mobile and circumscribed.

Evans, the daughter of a Nigerian mother and English father, was born in Neasden, northwest London, and is a graduate of the University of East Anglia writing centre. Her two novels, *26a* (2005) and *The Wonder* (2009), have so far received limited critical attention. In my reading of her work, I identify a nascent, non-normative black British aesthetic which leads to a vital re-visioning of black British subjecthood within a multi-locational vernacular cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is therefore offered as an alternative to the problematic generational model located in other black British literatures. In order to frame my reading of Evans's work, I turn again to Michael Keith's envisioning of the cosmopolitan as a space that foregrounds transcultural encounter and contact. Keith summarises cosmopolitan boundaries as 'both fictional and real' (20). These 'ethnicised boundaries that appear generally unbreakable, then momentarily invisible' (20), allow for cultural exchange at a local level between disparate ethnic groups. In exemplifying both non-normative and European trajectories, the narrative encounter with black British subjecthood



positions an emergent black British aesthetic which constitutes a breaking away from earlier genealogical models.

Gerard Delanty's view of cosmopolitanism deems it as 'refer[ring] to a transformation in self-understanding as a result of the engagement with others over issues of global significance. It is concerned with identifying processes of self-transformation arising out of the encounter with others in the context of global concerns' ('The Cosmopolitan Imagination' 218). In the movement across national and conceptual boundaries by the characters of Bessi, Georgia, Lucas and Antoney, Evans's protagonists transform themselves through, and in spite of, the cultural exchanges in which they engage. In focusing on the multi-locational cosmopolitanism of the narratives investigated here, I will explore a cosmopolitanism which foregrounds transcultural exchange in its configuration of modes of being in the world. Navigating the non-normative narrative trajectories of *26a*'s twins' travel from Neasden to Sekon and back again, and of *The Wonder*'s Antoney as he embarks on his European tour and the conceptual influence of that tour, decades later, on his son Lucas, leads to a positioning of the cosmopolitan as hopeful yet limited, gesturing towards but not yet obtaining a post-racial rendering of the transnational.

Far from cosmopolitan perspectives being 'ultimately present-day expressions of the old "Pax Britannica": the liberal story that Empire likes to tell about itself' (Chrisman 158) – a perpetuation of inequality visited by the elite on global politics and movement – the texts investigated here explore a cosmopolitanism of movement which allows for both conceptual and physical boundary crossing, and one which is not limited to the socially and financially elite. John McLeod argues that an emphasis on critical black British canon-building 'risk[s] falsifying the mechanics of black British creativity and tradition and look[s] only at national, rather than transnational, fields of influence' ('Some Problems with "British"' 57). In Evans's work, the

transnational is foregrounded, and London becomes another stage within the global theatre. It can be both home and hostile, but the same is also true for the diasporic and European spaces which Evans's characters navigate. The mobility of the Hunter children leads to fragmentation, and consequently a vexed cosmopolitanism is found incubating in *26a*. However, my reading will show that it is through a plural cosmopolitan mobility which acknowledges local as well as transcultural exchange that Evans's narratives engages with and breaks down the boundaries of "normative" black British writing.

In what was to become a defining statement about black British writing, Kwame Dawes's 1999 article, 'Negotiating the Ship on the head: Black British fiction' argues that the black populations of Britain had, for centuries, worn a figurative 'ship on the head', in which the ship stood for an 'instantaneous narrative of journey' (Dawes 18) which both explains and apologises for their presence on English soil. In discussing the emergence of a black British literature in the late twentieth century which both engaged and transformed notions of English literature, Dawes argues that

[t]imes have changed and the children of the earlier generation, born in England and often to bi-racial parents, do not carry the ship comfortably on their heads. They are introducing something of a dilemma in the British literary scene because they are often unwilling to or incapable of wearing that ship that points to an immigrant identity of 'otherness'. Many of them will reject any lineage with the [migrant] writers of the fifties and sixties and quite arrogantly (if understandably) and perhaps foolishly, assert a new invention: the black British voice.

(Dawes 19)

While Dawes acknowledges the inherent difference in status between ‘first-generation’ migrant writers such as Lamming and Selvon, and the later work of British-born black writers, he also dismisses these differences as ‘foolishly’ leading the second- and third- generations of British-born blacks to believe that they could realistically write a new canon into existence – that of black British literature. He argues that, on the contrary, black British writers’ preoccupation with being ‘at home’ in Britain builds upon the themes of alienation and exile so apparent in the work of post-war migrant writers. However, as Mark Stein has pointed out, whatever the problems of setting all minoritised English literature under the umbrella term ‘black British’, ‘nevertheless, in propounding connections and connectedness across difference, the concept is of particular usefulness’ (Stein 91). The ‘routine daily negotiation about crossing boundaries and barriers’ (M. Phillips ‘Migration, Modernity and English Writing’ 27) which has been identified as a key feature of black British literature of the 1990s has been linked with themes of fragmented consciousness and psychic splitting in the critical work surrounding these texts. Yet to read narrowly authors such as Zadie Smith, Bernardine Evaristo, and my subject here, Diana Evans, as inheritors of a migrant sensibility based on racial experience is to devalue and ignore the important work that British-born, and often mixed-race, authors have done in re-casting black British experience within an English framework. Of course, Dawes cannot yet see in 1999 the advent of a twenty-first century black British writing which, I argue, begins to move away from migrant-derived paradigms and towards a new and particular kind of cosmopolitan outlook. Dawes’s interpretation of the emergent ‘black British voice’, coming as it did at the end of the 1990s, can be useful in drawing a line under twentieth century black British writing,

and as a starting point from which millennial black British writing could, and did, evolve.

In my reading of Diana Evans' debut novel, *26a*, I will investigate its multiple expressions of black Britishness within a global frame. Unlike the celebratory cosmopolitanism of Zadie Smith's two novels *White Teeth* (2000) and *NW* (2012), and the limited cosmopolitanism of Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* (2005), *26a* takes on the ramifications of multifarious modes of being on the development of selfhood, and in doing so explores varied approaches to contemporary articulations of cosmopolitanism. Rather than reading the twin protagonists as fragments of a whole, we might see instead that it is only in their exploration of doubling (and not splitting) that they can reconcile and accommodate each other in the world. Evans was born in England, the daughter of a British father and Nigerian mother. *26a* and her second novel, *The Wonder* (2009), are both largely set in London, and feature crossings which do not necessarily centralise familiar themes of racial or cultural belonging. Rather, they feature protagonists who struggle with mental health issues that are not solely precipitated by feelings of racialized alienation. By continuing to read the novels of young black British authors with reference to received or outmoded migrant paradigms, arguably we perpetuate the 'neat evolutionary model of black British writing' which denies their reach 'beyond the more specific parameters of black Britishness', as delineated by John McLeod ('Extra Dimensions' 47). Like McLeod, my work considers 'how contemporary black writing is often endeavouring to redraft an understanding of the nation and its people that is prompted by, but ultimately supersedes, exclusively black British concerns' ('Extra Dimensions' 46). I argue that in addition to the concerns with nation, contemporary black British writing is also concerned with global connections and the redefining of attachments to place and space. Specifically, my reading of *26a* will examine three key themes of the novel –

those of 'home', 'mirroring', and mental illness – and posit that while the subjects of alienation, foreignness, and psychic splitting of earlier migrant literature are present in the novel, in *26a* these three themes function differently and conclude in much more positive ways than that of post-war migrant writing. The novel's protagonists, Bessi and Georgia, struggle to synthesise their cross-cultural involvements and what I term mirrored, rather than twinned, experiences with their particular sense of self-identification. Each twin's sense of selfhood is further complicated by the trauma which one twin, Georgia, undergoes unbeknownst to her sister. I argue that, rather than perpetuating existing race-centred tropes of migrant or African literature, Diana Evans's work suggests another kind of being in the world and leads to an expression of racial experience that explores cosmopolitanism as an alternative to the problematic generational model of other black British literatures.

In locating Evans's work as black British rather than migrant or diasporic, I am consciously aligning her with a specifically black British cosmopolitanism which my thesis has thus far explored in contemporary black British writing. I argue that to align Evans with African-born writers based solely on her ancestry rather than her cultural experience is to override the particular influences of a childhood spent in multi-ethnic London, one which is quite obviously expressed in the narrative preoccupations of *26a*. The young protagonists of *26a* do not struggle to find themselves represented or voiced within London's late-twentieth century cultural melee – on the contrary, London is their city, which they navigate with confidence as they experiment with youthful exuberance with law-breaking, sexual experiences, and drugs. Their flight to Lagos stirs in them not an urge of primal return, but is reminiscent instead of middle-class family holidays. Bessi's later journey to St. Lucia to volunteer in a school, Kemy's holiday to Jamaica for Carnival, and Bel's multiple trips to the family village in Nigeria evoke a 'postcolonial cosmopolitanism' whose

hallmarks are the ‘global flows of transnational cultural traffic’ (Robbins ‘Introduction’ 1) in which the three young sisters willingly engage. While it has been a topic of healthy scholarly debate whether or not ‘transnational migrant communities can be characterised as examples of cosmopolitanism in the robust normative sense’, as the British-born children of a migrant mother and therefore not migrant figures themselves, the Hunter children engage in the kind of cosmopolitan flaneurship – closer to the cosmopolitanism of the tourist – that their mother cannot (Cheah 37). But in the figure of Georgia, who fails to reconcile her sense of self to the point at which she can no longer exist as a being-in-the-world, Evans’s vexed cosmopolitanism nevertheless expresses a departure point for the black British subject. As my reading will explore, the hopeful cosmopolitanism of Bessi, Kemi and Bel Hunter is shadowed by their sister Georgia, whose mobility leads to a fragmented self. As my reading will show, the novel’s exploration of multi-locational cosmopolitan subjectivity through four characters’ movements figuratively casts aside paradigmatic twentieth-century racial identities, leading to a hesitant, circumscribed cosmopolitanism which nonetheless moves beyond the generation model of black British writing.

*26a* can be read as an example of the black British *Bildungsroman* novel, as it charts the journey to adulthood of the Anglo-Nigerian twin protagonists, Bessi and Georgia. Stein’s notion of the black British *Bildungsroman* is ‘about the problematics of subjecthood attained through dialectical interaction between self and society, articulated in a chronological and linear narrative structure’ (Stein 92-93). Yet in referencing Stein I am less interested in *26a* as a novel of development with particular narrative stylistic features, as I am with the idea of black British writing articulating ‘connectedness across difference’ which ‘entails processes of negotiation’ (Stein 104). The language Stein uses here presupposes Anthony Appiah’s figuring of cosmopolitanism as ‘universalism plus difference’ (*Cosmopolitanism* xv), and links

the two together. As I will show, the twin protagonists of the novel are in constant negotiation with both their surroundings and with each other, as they investigate and explore both local and global ways of being. Georgia, ‘who was born first, forty-five minutes first’ is the less independent of the two twins, a personality trait perhaps explained by her spending ‘her first human month in an incubator, with wires in her chest, limbs straggling and pleading like a beetle on its back’ (26a 4). The twins, along with their white English father Aubrey, Nigerian mother Ida, and sisters Bel (older) and Kemy (younger), later travel to Nigeria when Aubrey is given the opportunity to work there for three years. It is during this period immediately prior to the twins’ adolescence that a traumatic event causes Georgia to begin to withdraw from the emotional closeness she and her twin had previously shared, and that triggers the mental instability which ultimately results in her suicide. The novel’s title, *26a*, refers to the twins’ ‘magical paradise world’ (Evaristo ‘Diana Evans in conversation’ 33) that the girls create in the attic of their parents’ semi-detached family home. The twins ‘lived at 26a Waifer Avenue and the other Hunters were at 26, down the stairs where the house was darker’ (26a 5). This darkness is not just literal, but figurative, in that the attic room provides an escape from their alcoholic father’s dark moods and their mother’s withdrawal. Dedicated to Evans’s own twin sister, Paula, who committed suicide at the age of twenty-four, the novel is a semi-autobiographical attempt, in the author’s words, to ‘make a monument to [Paula] . . . to write about human experience and universal experiences rather than write about what it means to be black or mixed-race’ (Evaristo ‘Diana Evans in conversation’ 33). The novel explores the close relationship between the twins, as well as the wider familial bonds they experience. As Georgia struggles to feel accepted, it is Bessi and Kemy who offer a model of cosmopolitanism which, I argue, reflects a ‘reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance’ (Robbins ‘Introduction’ 3). These

multiple levels of attachment meet with limited success, but point towards the ability of black British writing to speak across national and ethnic boundaries to depict contemporary experience. While Bessi, Kemy and Bel deliver a cosmopolitan model of black British aesthetics and movement, this is shadowed by Georgia's fortunes, in which her mobility leads to fragmentation and charts instead a vexed cosmopolitanism.

Much of the existing critical literature which addresses *26a* focusses on the theme of twinning in the novel – of Bessi and Georgia's 'twoness in oneness' (*26a* 42). In highlighting this theme the narrative is linked to existing scholarship on African mythologies. Irene Perez-Fernandez writes that 'the novel stresses the bidirectional relation established between the social and the spatial . . . characterised by both twinship and hybridity' (292). She posits that, 'if twinship is a powerful metaphor for the in-between – never complete, never fixed – position where diasporic identities are located' then Georgia's death 'can be metaphorically read as bringing to an end such in-betweenness' (Perez-Fernandez 300). Yet this reading of the novel seems to bypass Evans's own stated narrative concerns, and returns to the language of Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha in positioning her novel alongside late-twentieth century concerns of migrant identity. In addition, Elleke Boehmer's argument that Georgia's death 'conced[es] something to the old Igbo taboo about twins – that nature does not like to allow this kind of mirror-image replication' (147) – aligns Evans with Nigerian writers Ben Okri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. However, this alignment of the text with Nigerian writers whose experiences and links to Africa are very different to Evans's does not adequately account for Evans's particular situation as a black British writer.

Critics have also established a link between Evans's *26a* and her fellow British-Nigerian writer Helen Oyeyemi's debut novel, *Icarus Girl* (2005). This link



has partially been drawn thanks to both novels debuting in the same year by young, female black British writers, but also due to the similar narrative concerns of the two novels, which both feature British-born protagonists who travel to Nigeria and experience varying levels of trauma, and who are both exposed to Nigerian mythologies regarding twins. Pilar Cuder-Dominguez contends that ‘an analysis of the novels . . . as either solely British or Nigerian remains problematic and at best simplistic . . . such an approach goes against the spirit of what are two profoundly diasporic novels’ (‘Double Consciousness’ 278). Cuder-Dominguez’s work, while highlighting the similarities between the two novels, acknowledges that they resolve the “identity crises” of their mixed-race protagonists in very different ways. While Jessamy, the young protagonist of Oyayemi’s *The Icarus Girl*, eventually reconciles the competing tensions of her Nigerian (the fantasy twin Tilly Tilly) and British selves, in the case of *26a*,

there can be no perfect union of identities, which would seem to collide rather than collaborate. The imprint that the Nigerian visit leaves on the twins resonates with death and gendered violence. They are unable to cope with both kinds of heritage.

(‘Double Consciousness’ 284)

This inability to cope with the violent resonances of their time in Nigeria ultimately causes a rift between Georgia, the victim of the violence, and her twin Bessi, who is unaware of Georgia’s ordeal. In Cuder-Dominguez’s analysis, this splitting of the girls’ twinship leaves their status as diasporic subjects fractured. However, this reading overlooks Bessi’s subsequent belief that Georgia has inhabited her own body, an expression of twinship first introduced to the girls by their Nigerian grandfather in

his story of Onia and Ode.<sup>24</sup> Bessi, on whom the story had little impact, was unaware that in the throes of her depression, Georgia was seeing visions of the fated Onia, whose twin Ode was put to death for fear of witchcraft and who then inhabited Onia's body for one year. In Georgia's vision, she asks Onia "If I ever wanted to" . . . "could I do it too?" (26a 172). The narrative presents Onia and Ode's fate as a foreshadowing of Bessi and Georgia's ending. Similarly, reviews of 26a which regard the novel as 'voic[ing] the concerns at the heart of first and second generation migrant experience – what it feels like to be separated from family whilst trying to fit into a world that refuses to accept you' (Ugboma 79) disregard the twins' status at the figurative heart of their (admittedly difficult) family life. The twins' status as mixed-race individuals in Britain is not foregrounded in the novel as a key factor in Georgia's mental decline – rather, it is an episode of gendered violence in Nigeria that allows England to be a place of refuge and return for her.

As well as exploring Evans's status within a Black British tradition, my analysis of 26a will explore the contemporary resonances of the novel's singular preoccupation with a gendered perspective of mental illness. In order to do so, I will foreground three key moments of the text. First, I will seek to problematize the received critical status of Evans as working inside a Nigerian, second-generation paradigm by investigating her positioning of Nigeria as a place of antagonism and

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<sup>24</sup> In the novel, the twins' Nigerian grandfather recounts the myth of Onia and Ode:

He told them of a woman who once had two twin girl twins who were best friends from the very beginning, even before they were inside their mother's womb, when they were spirits. Their names were Onia and Ode. Onia was first. Ode was second – they set her on fire.

When Ode was burnt [. . .] Onia got sick and wouldn't eat at all until Ode's ghost entered her body. The ghost came in, and Onia began to eat again from her cursed mother's breast. But Ode could only stay for one year, because that was how long it took for the soul to be ready to leave the earth. After that, there would be no choice.

resonating violence. I will then explore the hostile home environment of her parents Ida and Aubrey, and the use of mirroring in the text, which I will posit as an alternative reading to the critical reception of the ‘twinning’ of the novel. Finally, I will chart the progression of the narrative from ‘mirroring’ to ‘splitting’, which simulates Georgia’s own mental decline. It is my contention that while these narrative techniques are indebted to the traditions of postcolonial writing from both Africa and beyond, Evans’s writing itself moves forward from postcolonial migrant concerns towards a contemporary cosmopolitan writing that is not necessarily celebratory.

In a paper given at the Black British Women’s Writing conference in Brighton in July 2014, black British author and academic Laura Fish discussed the narrative of *26a* as a literary descendent of Virginia Woolf’s feminist essay, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). In her exploration of the linkages between Woolf’s stance that mirrors are essential to violent or heroic acts, Fish claimed that black women’s bodies function as mirrors in a dual way, and are used in literature to unravel racial power and oppression. According to Fish, in black British women’s writing, mirroring is used as a motif to understand racial othering as both reflective and distortive (Fish 2014). When Georgia finally confesses to Bel the incident of abuse in Sekon, Evans describes how she ‘stood up suddenly and saw her face in the mirror. A pitiful thing, not pretty, a dark old thing. The worst bit’ (*26a* 101). This distortion of her self-image is a direct result of her assault at the hands of the Nigerian groundsman, Sedrick, and the subsequent silence surrounding it. This traumatic event causes her to misidentify herself as ‘the worst bit’, and to valorise her twin Bessi as ‘where bad things never happen’ (101). If, as Bhabha asserts, the ‘image as identity is always threatened by lack’ (Bhabha 110), then in her casting of herself as the “bad twin” of legend, Georgia distorts and prevents her growth, a distortion which ultimately leads her to end her life. In her use of the motif of mirrors, Evans aligns her narrative with

characterizations of the self ‘as a double, an ontological split, a shared identity, an absence, anonymous, drifting away from itself, splintered into mirror images’ (Gregg 50). This ‘drifting away’ describes not only the slow splintering of the twinship of Bessi and Georgia, but also the splintered relationship of Ida and Aubrey, whose initial relationship Evans describes as

a quenching of loneliness, a substitute for a dream or a filling of a void, they fell into one another head first with their eyes closed, touching each other’s different chests and different hair . . . they were married within a year, strangers still, unaware of the knots hidden inside.

(26a 37)

Despite the married couple’s insistence on their difference, each becomes a mirror image of the other, retreating into the roles – wife, African; provider, Englishman – that have been decided for them. Their fractured inner lives are doubles, each hidden from the other. Aubrey reaches out to the ‘exotic other’ as a symbol of his own fractured self. Rather than fetishizing Ida, he instead domesticizes her through their marriage and subsequent child-bearing. As time passes, and Ida begins to internalise her desire to return to Nigeria, Aubrey counters her reliance on African myths of protection by surrounding himself and their children with comforting images of rural, unspoilt England. Through their paradoxical return to essentialised visions of their respective ethnicities, Ida and Aubrey re-imagine themselves in contradiction to the personalities which at first brought them together. Ida’s rejection of her father’s traditionalist vision is mirrored in Aubrey’s desire to escape his overbearing mother’s wishes for her son, first by escaping Derby for London, and later by taking up a post in Lagos, where he meets Ida. Upon their return to England and subsequent marriage,

Aubrey battles his family's prejudice against his wife and their mixed-race children. Yet rather than drawing together in these difficult circumstances, Aubrey and Ida each retreat into the versions of themselves that least reflect their initial attraction to each other. In her use of deceptive reflections, Evans' narrative warns of the danger of accepting the image in the mirror, the distorted reflection of insecurities and trauma which lead only to circumscription and constraint.

In addition, as Evans describes the twins' home in Neasdon early in the novel, she places mirrors at the heart of the conflict of cultures with which the girls' parents, Ida and Aubrey, struggle:

Opposite the mirror in the hallway, *so that you could see it if you saw yourself*, Ida put up an ebony carving of an old spirit woman with horns. "It will give us wisdom," she told Aubrey, "and wise children." . . . In the dining room he lined the main wall with miniature watercolours of the English countryside . . . . Ida put more heads all over the house . . . finally, for the living room, Aubrey chose, very carefully, a large-scale tapestry of the Derbyshire dales. They were colliding, silently, through geography.

(37-8, emphasis added)

Ida re-establishes her lost connection with Nigeria through a reliance on traditional mythologies of masks which protect their owners – this despite her youthful rejection of African traditions. Her crucial decision to run away from her tribal village when her father arranged her marriage to a much older man eschews the traditional female role expected of her and led her to Lagos, where she met the transplanted Englishman Aubrey. It is only once disconnected from her homeland that she seeks a return to the comfort of African traditions and myths. Ida fulfils the role of the migrant in Evans's

narrative, as she struggles to adapt to English life and eventually retreats further and further into a fantasy world populated by ghosts of Africa. The mask which she positions at the head of the stairs, ‘so that you could see it if you saw yourself’ functions as a talisman of her difference that she hopes to pass on to her children, but it is also essentialises her position as an African migrant. When the children look in the mirror, they see reflected there their mixed-race selves grounded firmly in an implied Africanness in the shape of the mask. In this way the mirror imposes an Afrocentric identity on the girls which is ultimately problematic. The reflection itself is an imposition, coercing the girls into an image of themselves they do not recognise. Home in *26a* is a place of contention, imposition, and danger – the danger of Aubrey’s anger in London, and the danger of the groundskeeper’s lust in Nigeria. In London, the stairs lead to the mirror in which the talismanic mask is reflected, while in Sekon, the children are told to beware the polished marble staircase, in case they fall and hurt themselves. That both homes are imposing and dangerous symbolises the danger of essentialising the girls’ mixed ways of being. As the novel places their homes as both figurative, and later literal, zones of conflict, home becomes not a place of refuge, but a place of hostility which threatens the safety of Bel, Bessi, Georgia and Kemy. For Aubrey and Ida’s daughters, initially at least, the ‘freedom of self-creation’ (Chrisman 157) that cosmopolitanism offers is constrained by tactics with which their parents attempt to “claim” their young multi-located selves.

When the family is given the opportunity to relocate temporarily to Sekon through Aubrey’s work, Georgia and Bessi articulate the anxiety at the heart of their parents’ ‘silently colliding’ worlds:

The whole thing was getting out of control. They were losing their home. They were losing Christmas. They were going to where summer was winter. They

were going against the grain of their lives. . . They'd grow older, and become foreign. "Will we be Nigerians?" . . . "What do you mean? You are Nigerian now," [Ida] said. "But only half," Bessi pointed out, "If we live there, will we be *all* Nigerian?"

(44, emphasis in orig.)

Evans appears to locate the girls' position as mixed-race subjects as a source of splitting. The prospect of returning to Nigeria brings to the surface anxieties over how they will be able to retain their "Englishness" and prevent themselves from "becoming foreign". The conversation between Bessi and her mother also exposes the inherent mismatch between Ida's expectations of her children's inner worlds – that, because she is Nigerian, they, despite their dual heritage, automatically recognise themselves as such – with the lived reality of the girls' nascent sense of their own identities. Although, and perhaps because, they are recognisably of African descent, Georgia and Bessi worry that their cultural self, their European-ness, will be lost in Lagos. Ironically, this fear is immediately dispelled on their arrival in Sekon, when local children greet them 'shouting Oyibo! Oyibo! Which meant white, severely undermining how Nigerian they could be' (59). The exchange between Bessi and Ida establishes Nigeria as a destabilising force before the family arrives. Yet the experiences of Bessi and Georgia in Sekon, and later when they return to London, show that is only through rethinking their mixed-race subjectivity that the children can make use of the connectedness across difference that their position as cosmopolitan figures, compelled to move with different degrees of comfort across multiple boundaries and borders, allows them. Their subjecthood then becomes the site of potential reconstellation, rather than splitting. While their parents insist on emphasising their "halves", it is here that their twinhood helps the children – they are

doubled, rather than split. The family unit, while at times perilous, ultimately participates in a 'recurrent reassemblage' (Schoene 21) through the course of the narrative, as the family members re-evaluate and reconfigure both their personal and national relationships, however imperfectly.<sup>25</sup>

Brenda Cooper has theorised that Evans, along with other contemporary female diasporic writers, 'occupy an ambiguous space of contested citizenship because of what they inherit from Africa and because they wear the signs of their parents' backgrounds on their black bodies. But they occupy a profoundly different [performative] territory from their parents' (Twinning in three diasporic novels' 51). While Cooper views Ida's African mask diasporically, as a 'spirit woman [who] coexists with a concrete and material world, which substitutes for the language that Ida had left behind', and a symbol of Georgia and Bessi's 'multiple lives' ('Twinning in three diasporic novels' 56), in contrast, I read the mask as a symbol marking the distance between their own construction of self with that of Ida's. While Ida places her African heritage at the heart of their home lives, for the twins it remains on the periphery, locked in Ida's 'dressing gown days' and behind the closed bathroom door. Narratively as well, Evans pushes Nigeria to the periphery: the whole traumatic Nigerian interlude preoccupies just a few dozen pages of the text. Whilst over the course of the narrative the resonances of her experience in Nigeria increasingly encroach upon Georgia's well-being, at first the girls are dismissive of the importance of Nigeria upon their own configurations of selfhood. Indeed, like their mother, they escape into fantasy to cope with being transplanted to a foreign country. But Georgia dreams of meeting the ghost of Gladstone in his eponymous park near their English

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<sup>25</sup> I have already referred in the introduction to Berthold Schoene's theorisation of the cosmopolitan community as a 'community that bears rupturing and indeed thrives on recurrent reassemblage', and here I identify the Hunter family as exemplifying one form of such a community (Schoene 21).



home as, for her, the experience of “return” only serves to split her from her sense of Europeanness. She never fully feels safe or at home in Nigeria, a feeling only compounded by her assault at the hands of the family groundsman, Sedrick. Sedrick’s failed attempt to rape Georgia not only precipitates her mental decline but is also the cause of her emotional break with her twin. For the first time, Georgia keeps a secret from her sister, determined not to pass on her ‘shadows’ to Bessi. The rift she feels with her twin continues in London, and a pubescent Georgia struggles to cope, wanting ‘to tell her about the cockroaches, about what happened. She wanted to say, one night in Sekon... that night. She wanted to say Sedrick, that night, he. But she felt them crawling towards her, up the bedspread’ (93). The cockroaches, an insect found only in tropical climates, become symbolic of Georgia’s internalised trauma. She imagines seeing them whenever her mind struggles to cope, and, knowing that they are imaginary, hides them from her twin, as she hides the truth of what happened to her in Sekon. Like Ida’s imaginary conversations with the spirit of her mother, Nne Nne, Georgia’s imagination conjures memories of Africa which prevent her from fully participating in everyday life, and threaten both her mental stability and her physical health. Africa, then, far from being a place of refuge, is at all times in the narrative a place to be distrusted, exposing the disjunctions between the girls’ maternal ancestry and their present-day cultural experience.

Georgia and her mother are positioned as mirrors, or reflections, of each other from very early on in the novel’s narrative. When Ida is introduced to the reader, we are told that, ‘like Georgia, Ida gave the impression – the quietness, the sideways look – of someone who was always leaving and who has never fully arrived’ (18). While Ida’s displacement is explained by her migrant status, Georgia’s is more mysterious, ethereal, and eventually explained by her premature death, which in itself mirrors her premature birth. As the narrative progresses, however, we see that there are in fact a

multiplicity of ways in which Georgia mirrors her mother. When her husband, Aubrey, begins to succumb to an alcoholism which leads to rages, Ida wishes her absent mother, Nne Nne, into existence in the house, and begins to rely on this vision of her past. As she removes herself from the reality of everyday life, 'her homesickness took on a new intensity and her refuge became the bath' (39). Due to this retreat into visions, Aubrey and the children find it increasingly difficult to engage with her. Similarly, when Georgia begins to descend into the breakdown which will eventually lead her to take her life, she becomes increasingly preoccupied with visions of cockroaches (symbolic of her sexual assault, as we have seen) and Ode and Oniya, the mythical Igbo twins upon whom she hopes to be "reunited" with Bessi through death. While Ida is preoccupied with returning her fractured self to Nigeria through her visions, Georgia is preoccupied with healing what she sees as the fracturing of the twins' 'twoness in oneness'. Both of these potentially fatal instabilities are precipitated by a gendered violence enacted on the women – for Ida, the threatened violence of Aubrey's alcoholism, and for Georgia, the attempted sexual assault by Sedrick.

That said, it is not the case that positive representations of diasporic movement are absent in Evans's novel. While the experience of living in Nigeria plunges Ida and Georgia further into imaginary worlds which divorce each of them from the realities of life in London upon their return, for Bel and Bessi the journey overseas has a much more positive outcome. Bel, who being older experiences Sekon on different terms to the twins (she experiences her first love affair there) returns to London as a confident, empowered black woman. She begins to study "natural" hairdressing, and moves out of their parents' home at eighteen when she becomes pregnant. Her subsequent experience of motherhood and "psychic visions" draw her closer to Ida, and she emerges as the strongest female character in the novel, often looking out for and

counselling the twins. However, her placement on the periphery of the twin's narrative shows the inadequacy of this seemingly positive experience of Afro-centric cosmopolitanism to account for the full range of multi-racial trajectories present in contemporary black British life.

In addition to Bel's positive experience of Nigeria, when Bessi travels to the Caribbean for six months, she sends home rapturous letters to Georgia and revels in her new-found singlehood. Unlike Georgia, Bessi does not view their displacement as a separation. Rather, her journey to the unfamiliar island of St. Lucia to volunteer in a local school satisfies that which Anthony Appiah regards as the cosmopolitan subject's 'obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind' (*Cosmopolitanism* xv). Despite feelings of cultural displacement – her host in St Lucia is horrified that she won't eat bananas – Bessi acclimatizes to the island, and she returns to London 'the darkest coffee ever with a new walk and foreign memories' (26a 151). This emphasis on the *foreignness* of the Caribbean to Bessi offers a revision of the accepted paradigms of racial "belonging". Her journey to St Lucia is as a modern-day missionary figure, a black British woman travelling to a less fortunate country in order to offer service and exchange cultures. In her journey to St Lucia, Bessi engages in the cosmopolitan flaneurship that Simon Gikandi has positioned as

the inscription of cosmopolitanism as a state of mind and an aesthetic practice, a cultivated sensibility that underscores one's detachment from the local and ethnic and a willingness to engage with the Other . . . Cosmopolitans are the flaneurs of our age, walking the cities of the world, convinced that their identity can only be mirrored through their engagement with others, sure of their mastery of global cultural flows and their secure place within it.

Bessi's journey to St Lucia is reminiscent of Gikandi's cosmopolitan, who travels the world with a sense of security of their place within the global flows of commerce and tourism. As her impressions of the island make clear, St Lucia for her holds resonances of both her Nigerian and English homes. She maintains a sense of detachment from the locality of the island, secure in the knowledge that she will soon return home. Hers is not a journey of ancestral discovery, but instead she forges cross-cultural links and pushes the boundaries of her experience, enabling her to locate a cosmopolitan mode of being. This proto-cosmpolitanism allows her to return to London secure in the knowledge that she has found a 'mirror' which does not invoke her twinship, but rather the connectiveness of experiencing a Caribbean, rather than African or English, mode of living.

It is Bessi's knowledge of the global connections possible in the contemporary world which creates a further conceptual distance from her twin. Bessi cultivates an independent selfhood during her time in St Lucia, but in her absence Georgia has begun to unravel. The letters exchanged between the twins during this period are presented to the reader in chronological order, starting with Bessi's first letter on arrival in St Lucia and ending with Bel's appeal to her sister to return home for the sake of her twin. While Bessi's letters are full of the exuberance of new experiences, and positive linkages between her experience of Sekon and St Lucia, Georgia's letters become increasingly distant and despairing. The reader experiences the beginnings of Georgia's breakdown as it is revealed to Bessi, with talk of 'evil pens' and a London which is 'inhabited by beasts' (26a 142). Her sense of separation from her twin is symbolised by her accusation that, not being able to commune with Bessi during a dream, her twin 'must have been busy, or in some other dream' (142). The reader is

drawn to the conclusion that Georgia is edging nearer and nearer to a mental breakdown, a sense confirmed by the final letter, in which Bel exhorts her sister to ‘come home and comfort your twin’ (145). Georgia, who eventually chooses to study history at university because she is ‘interested in how the past made us’ (26a 151), fails to use ‘the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being’ (Hall ‘Who needs identity?’ 4). If we read Georgia’s breakdown in terms of Stuart Hall’s exhortation that ‘identities are constituted within, not outside representation’ (‘Who needs identity?’ 4), then Georgia’s failure to establish a reflection of herself in the absence of her twin is a failure adequately to form her own singular selfhood. Without that separate self, it naturally follows that on her death she and Bessi can be merged into the same being. Therefore we can read her inhabitation of Bessi as a figurative motif which, rather than establishing the primacy of African mythologies to the diasporic self, warns against the failure to interpolate the different elements of cultural and physical subjectivities. Georgia can never venture past her points of simulation with Bessi, and so in the end their fracture, the parts of them which are not mere reflection but points of divergence, lead her into mental illness and decline. Georgia’s fate exemplifies a failure to build being using all the resources of black British life as she is constrained and weighed down by Afrocentric pressures that are presented in terms of harming personhood through the incidence of abuse. By focusing on rebuilding the past, she fails to contribute to a proto-cosmopolitan future alongside her sisters. Evans’s rendering of the dynamic between the twin protagonists invokes a cautious, critical tone. The cosmopolitanism sought by Bessi and refused by Georgia is therefore suspect and incomplete. Bessi’s flaneurism cannot be celebratory, when it is shadowed by the fragmentation of Georgia. Georgia’s experience of Sekon, and her later suicide, therefore serves to de-idealise any advocacy of cosmopolitan flaneurship which the novel risks.

In her rendering of Kemy, Evans gives us perhaps the most hopeful of the cosmopolitan trajectories of the novel. The younger sister longs to be the “third twin”, and, jealous of the closeness of Bessi and Georgia’s relationship, she inserts herself into the narrative shared by the twins. Of the three, Kemy comes closest to realising a ‘freely created cosmopolitan cultural identity based on notions of “global” citizenship’ (Chrisman 157). Like Bessi, Kemy journeys to the Caribbean as a young woman, and it is there that she learns of Georgia’s death. Kemy travels light-heartedly through the diaspora, engaging with the cultural objects which suit her. As a young girl she becomes obsessed with the pop star Michael Jackson, and in her teenage years she goes against Ida’s wishes by growing her hair into dreadlocks and attending Carnival in Jamaica. While Georgia is not able to be accommodated in the contemporary world and can be read as a failed cosmopolitan, and Bessi’s forays into cross-cultural cosmopolitan life are circumscribed by Georgia’s death, Kemy’s experiences suggest another kind of being in the world which embraces plurality. As I have suggested, it is not only Kemy’s crossing of national boundaries that reflect her cosmopolitanism, but also her investment in global flows of popular culture. While Bessi and Georgia are making their first forays into adolescent love, Kemy is experiencing another milestone, attending Michael Jackson’s concert at Wembley Stadium:

They were surrounded by jerry curls and Michael’s songs blasting out from car windows. Wembley, a place where in the afternoons old women used prams as shopping trolleys, had become the centre of the world. They didn’t see Kemy. She was in there somewhere, probably near the front (she’d insisted Bel pick her up at four o’clock and let her queue outside). Dressed all in black,

she'd gelled her hair and made her lips bright red, and put on shoes with flat soles for moonwalking.

(121)

Georgia and Bessi, passing the stadium, describe a scene of invasion, surrounded by youngsters emulating their pop idol, dressing up in the image of their hero. The narrative at once familiarises and domesticates the scene with its reference to old women doing their shopping, and at the same time mythologises it with its reference to Wembley having 'become the centre of the world'. This language is reminiscent of colonialism, when London was indeed seen as the centre of the world – of the empire at least – but instead of being drawn to the centre, its inhabitants are looking outward to the diaspora. Kemy's obsession with 'Michael' (another familiarisation) is well established in the narrative at this point, and she begs and wheedles her family for the chance to attend the concert at Wembley. Jackson, at the height of his fame, represents the pinnacle of cross-cultural success, as his ability to turn a pocket of London into an enclave of global culture demonstrates. Culture here is seen to be not only mobile but also liberating, allowing the youngsters to take possession of the city space and rearrange it into a new social collective space, if only for one night. Bessi and Georgia do not participate in this cosmopolitan space – their experience of vexed, circumscribed models of the cosmopolitan are unable to accommodate such celebratory models of transience and exchange. With Kemy's transitory cosmopolitanism, the aesthetics of the narrative move beyond a generational model to posit an aesthetics of movement which is exemplified by her multifarious trajectories, travelling as she does between England, Africa and the Caribbean without the vexation of the twins' movements.

In the figures of Georgia, Bessi, and Kemy, the narrative allows for multiple articulations of cosmopolitanism, and with varying degrees of success. Bessi's attempts to locate herself in interaction across multiple locations of being are ultimately constrained by her reaction to Georgia's death, while Kemy is perhaps the most successful of Evans's characters in her attempts to participate in a global diasporic space. But it is the characterisation of Georgia, for whom cosmopolitan modes of being bring harms rather than freedoms, which Evans uses to evidence the problems that occur within 'connectedness across difference' which contemporary cosmopolitanism promises. Chris Weedon writes that

recent black British writing is making a positive contribution [to the process of creating a truly diverse society] by rendering visible the issues at stake, by suggesting new ways of articulating Britishness, and by offering a range of narratives of the interrelation between British and black histories.

(95)

Georgia fails to grasp these interrelations and new articulations, while at the same time her sisters attempt to engage with them. While Ida, Georgia, and Aubrey are all fractured individuals whose experiences are negatively reflected in one another, this fracture is not presented as being caused by a society which fails to accept their multi-heritage and bi-racial family unit. On the contrary, it is the journey "home" to Nigeria which precipitates both Ida's and Georgia's mental declines. Similarly, for Aubrey, it is only on his return to England with a wife and young child that 'he had come to realise that there was a part of him that was a stranger to the world and everything in it, and that was therefore supremely incapable of succeeding as a human being' (26a 39), precipitating his descent into frustrated anger and alcoholism. For each of these



troubled characters, home is, in fact, hostile, and not the place of refuge that marks much migrant and diasporic writing. Rather than positioning the narrative as distinctly dealing with the “issues” of blackness in Britain, the novel instead grapples with wider issues of cosmopolitan being. In doing so, the “interrelation” Evans opens up between blackness and Britishness is one in which the “blackness” of the subject becomes incidental to the story’s narrative. This is not to argue against the idea that, as Bernardine Evaristo has pointed out to Evans herself, ‘specifically black experiences – modes of being and modes of seeing – are as validly universal as any other experiences’ (Evaristo ‘Diana Evans in conversation’ 33). Rather, the novel points to a new way of articulating black British experience which interpolates Africanness and Englishness without privileging or invalidating either site of being for the mixed-race subject, allowing for multiple sites of attachment to be provisionally established across national and cultural boundaries, mindful all the time of the risks which this involves.

In the wake of my reading, then, it is clear that Kwame Dawes’s seminal imagery of the figurative ‘ship on the head’ of black British writers inadequately accounts for the work of twenty-first century writers such as Evans. Discussing the work of Bernardine Evaristo, whose writing I will turn to presently, Dawes notes that she ‘is emblematic of a number of interesting women writers in England – that brand of bi-racial people who write in ways that offer Britain a more cosmopolitan sense of self’ (21). However, he goes on to argue that in the work of writers such as Evaristo and Andrea Levy ‘we encounter a strained engagement with the question of myth and tradition’ (Dawes 21). Adding Evans’s name to that of Evaristo and Levy, my reading of *26a* shows multiple renderings of the cosmopolitan sense of self which Dawes identifies. In contrast to Dawes’ position, though, I argue that the engagement with myth in the narrative is merely a further exploration of a peculiarly black British

involvement with cosmopolitanism. With *26a*, Evans explores the mythical connections of twinship found in Igbo mythology. The novel's engagement with this myth is centred within a contemporary English setting which allows for multiple connections to be made across cultural reference points, bringing about a cosmopolitan selfhood within a particularly English frame. This schema expands previous critical readings of black women's writing as 'a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing' (Davies 4). Through the multiple and de-idealised cosmopolitan prototypes which Evans presents in the narratives of Bessi, Georgia, Kemy and Bel, the novel posits a vital and contested non-normative subjectivity which ultimately delivers an alternative to migrant models of black British aesthetics.

With *The Wonder*, Evans continues to expand the trajectories and boundaries of her cosmopolitan rendering of black British selfhood. She does this, in part, by turning the narrative focus towards Europe. Her protagonist, Lucas, slowly pieces together the history of his father Antoney's dance troupe, the Midnight Ballet, in 1960s London, and the narrative opens up a dialogue between Antoney's homeland of Jamaica and continental Europe through his preoccupation with the early twentieth-century Russian ballet dancer Waslaw Nijinsky. In charting the narrative turn to Europe, the cultural parameters of black British writing are advanced beyond the familiar triumvirate of Britain, Africa, and the United States. Antoney's childhood infatuation with dance is precipitated by attending a dance recital by the African-American Katherine Dunham in Jamaica, but it is through his discovery of Nijinsky that his creative and aesthetic potential is unlocked. His multifarious group of migrants and British-born dancers and musicians from various ethnic backgrounds embark on a tour of Europe which points towards the ability of a new black British aesthetic to articulate black European modes of belonging. The tour suggests a black

selfhood dependent not on generational or primarily British points of orientation, but established through transcultural trajectories and connections that face towards Europe rather than exclusively to Africa or the Caribbean. However, the subsequent breakdown of the players' working and personal relationships exposes the limitations surrounding the group's cosmopolitan trajectories. The limited cosmopolitanism offered in the novel echoes the hesitant, circumscribed cosmopolitanism of *26a*. In both novels Evans is proposing, but not celebrating, the capacity for black British writing to articulate a transcultural cosmopolitan mode of being in the world.

In his afterword to the edited collection *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (2009), Bernard Hesse criticises Gilroy's conceptualisation of the black European as 'requiring specific forms of double consciousness' (*Black Atlantic* 1), arguing that Gilroy's 'idea of the "between" or "continuity" seems to sustain the polarization Gilroy wants to criticize' (Hesse 301). Hesse proposes that Gilroy's configuration of black European belonging

forges the critique of that racial duality, namely that black Europe is both, neither, and more. The complexities of thinking through figurations of black Europe arise from its being irreducible to the fixed terms of either Europe or non-Europe in the classical metropole and colony schema. Its emergent identifications can be seen more acutely as a territorial imbrication of Europe and non-Europe undergoing radical revision by Black political and cultural spaces of representation.

(301)

In Evans's narratives, the 'cultural spaces of representation' which she envisions encompass not only Afro-Caribbean cultural mores, but also aesthetic influences from

Europe. Whether migrant or British-born, her characters are involved in a process of European cultural creation which is neither, in Hesse's terms, 'Europe or non-Europe'. Rather, Evans's protagonists are involved in the remoulding of aesthetic influences which transmute such racial binaries and allow them to occupy a space of belonging across cultural boundaries, and as such their aesthetic position can be viewed as 'both, neither, and more'. While Hesse goes on to argue that the analytical framework for the radical revision of black Europe is best represented through the ideas of negritude, I hesitate to look backwards to the twentieth-century for such a framework.<sup>26</sup> Instead, I propose that it is the proto-cosmopolitanisms explored in the novels of Evans and the other writers included in this study that allows for the articulation of a revisionary black European space. As my reading of Evan's second novel *The Wonder* will explore, in turning to the cultural influences of European and Afro-Caribbean aesthetics across racial boundaries, Evans configures a transcultural space which neither refutes nor relies upon previous articulations of black British aesthetics, but which introduces a new framework for alternative modes of black British belonging.

Waslaw Nijinsky, a choreographer and dancer at the turn of the twentieth century with the Ballets Russes, is the enigmatic "ghost behind the ghosts" in *The Wonder*. The novel's protagonist, Lucas, discovers Nijinsky's story while searching for his own absent father, the charismatic Jamaican dancer Antoney. Let me continue by citing the poem *Nijinsky's Jump* by the Irish poet Gerald Dawe.

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<sup>26</sup> Hesse argues, in his afterword to the edited collection *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana: 2009), that 'we might (re)turn for guidance to one of the most sustained configurations of black Europe as an imaginary during the twentieth century [negritude] . . . negritude symbolized the political idea of Black Europe in a number of significant ways . . . It remains symbolically the most insightful way of characterizing the cultural and political resources of Black Europe' (302).

*Nijinsky's Jump*

We'll never know what was on his mind

When the wife called the journalist in

To the sanatorium and after a while

One of them asked would he do

The famous gravity-defying jump,

So, in his good suit, this man,

Who has lost his reason, takes off

To the flash of incandescent photographs.

(Dawe 6)

The 'gravity-defying jump' immortalised in publicity photographs of the time, and in multiple poetic forms such as the epigraph above, is emulated in Antoney's belief that to dance is to fly. Lucas discovers that his father Antoney, dancing in London in the 1960s with his own troupe dubbed 'The Midnight Ballet', was inspired by Nijinsky, and it is slowly revealed (although never explicitly), that Nijinsky's story of sexual confusion and mental illness predestines Antoney's own fate. In linking the two men who are seemingly separated by time, culture, race and sexuality, Evans's narrative imaginatively "leaps" between cultural and historical norms. Rather than codifying a black Britishness which relies on the black Atlantic paradigm, *The Wonder* explores the cultural benefits of an otherwise unobserved black British aesthetic located interestingly in the past of the 1960s.

*The Wonder* opens in stasis. The protagonist, the twenty-five year old Lucas, lives with his older sister Denise on a stationary houseboat on London's Grand Union

Canal. The reader quickly learns that the two are orphans who have lived on the same houseboat all of their lives. Lucas has no job or prospects, and spends his day smoking joints and shooting the breeze with his partner-in-crime, the laid-back but gainfully employed Jake. The siblings have only fleeting, solipsistic memories of their Anglo-Welsh-Dominican mother, Carla, passed down by their Welsh grandmother Toreth. Of their father, Antoney, they know nothing, which is the cause that Lucas takes up during the novel, embarking as he does on an anthropological search for his father. In the course of his search he encounters the reviewer and biographer Riley, who had been a close friend of Antoney's. As Lucas slowly gathers information regarding his parents, the reader is drawn into a parallel narrative, a third-person account of his parents' meeting and formation of the "Midnight Ballet" (so-called because the dancers rehearse at night), their European tour, marriage, the subsequent breakdown of the marriage, and Carla's death. Yet what is key, in Lucas's narrative of discovery, is that he is not seeking an encounter with Antoney – this is a feeling engendered not just because he believes his father to be deceased, but also, I will argue, because it is not the *need* for a father, the filling of an absence, a first generation, with which the narrative is concerned. Rather, Evans's novel prioritises the search itself – the linking of disparate points, the unearthing of competing ambitions and influences and trajectories, which allow for a more inclusive and dynamic rendering of black Britishness. In discovering Afro-Europe through the imposition of Africa on European cultural mores, the narrative posits a new point of orientation for the black Briton.

With *The Wonder*, Evans plays with the expectations placed on black British cultural production. Set in the late 1990s, Evans foregrounds the nineties milieu early in the novel, as Lucas wakes to muse,

[i]t was time for a different waking view, a clear, open road, the inside of a girl's bedroom maybe. The twentieth century was drawing to a close. The Conservatives had come and gone, so had Tupac and Biggie. . . . yet here Lucas still was, staring at the same disturbing inanimate presence inches from his feet, blocking his path to the future.

(*The Wonder* 4-5)

Caught in the midst of media wars and political optimism, Lucas comes to realise that the future – his future – is of critical importance. As he moves forward into the twenty-first century, the desire for paradigms which underpin his life start to shift. Instead of being content, he is set adrift, like the image of the stationary houseboat that Evans conjures. Driving the narrative is his desire to leap forward, yet this can only be achieved by first leaping backwards, to the history of his father's arrival in, and eventual departure from, Carla and the children's lives. Evans surmises that 'the majority of boat-dwellers have one belief in common – water is freedom' (7). But Evans quickly contradicts this statement, declaring instead that, in the case of Lucas, Denise, and their boat 'Silver',

[t]hey were forgotten, it seemed, like the steps of a dance by people who don't dance. Survival was paramount, and Denise set with increased ferocity to her work. Pretty trips along the summer canal did not come into it. *Water was not freedom*. The boat had not sailed in a long time.

(9, emphasis added)

With this passage the narrative rejects the primacy of the symbolism of water to the black British subject. Rather than the boat evidencing a diasporic connectivity to their

ancestry, the siblings' abandonment on the boat leads to their being cut-off from the world around them. If 'water was not freedom', then they must work to free themselves from the predicament of genealogical constraint, an efficacy put in place by their orphaned status. Pilar Cuder-Dominguez insists that the oppositional relationship of the siblings – Denise's 'intense rootedness' symbolised by her work as a florist, and Lucas's 'intense aimlessness' – embodies Gilroy's contrastive paradigm of 'routes' versus 'roots', and that their houseboat home recalls 'Gilroy's slave ship' ('My father's garden' 2014) . While sympathetic to Cuder-Dominguez's central premise that the narrative recalls 'dynamic processes of remembering and forgetting [which] leads to collective cultural memory' ('My father's garden' 2014), my own analysis disputes her reading of the novel. Rather than seeing the houseboat as symbolic of the slave ship, I argue that in the novel it functions as a place of refuge, but also warns of the danger of stasis. The "illusion of movement" which the stationary boat provides is detrimental to both siblings, resulting in both Lucas's "aimlessness" (if he can always imagine that he could bring up the anchor and move at will, there is no need to actually do so), and his sister's "rootedness" (the comfort of sitting in the same chair her deceased mother and grandmother both occupied before her disallows her own potential for personal growth). But, crucially, it is not through identification with Black Atlantic tropes that the siblings are allowed an opportunity for growth. At the end of the novel, it is neither "escape" from the boat nor its "movement" which allows both siblings to move forward. Rather, it is Lucas's discovery, after months of careful repair, that the houseboat is incapable of sailing. Rather than succumbing to the fate of the boat, 'anchored in her apathy', Lucas sets off by rail to Penzance, 'the most exotic-seeming place on the departure boards' (*The Wonder* 311). The boat remains moored on the canal, incapable of movement. It is a



departure point not a vehicle for motion ultimately capable of setting both of its inhabitants upon a new course beyond its means.

In its function as a symbol of diasporic migrancy, the houseboat, which sits stalled and uncared for, its hull lacking the blacking which should have been applied to prevent rust (309) can also be seen to be indicative of multicultural Britishness as existing in a flawed state at the end of the twentieth century. Lucas and Denise are part of the fabric of Notting Hill, yet Lucas feels himself to be ‘a rough edge, insignificant, useful only in his ethnic contribution to the area’s general feel of being interesting’ (16). London, rather than being an enabling space, confines Lucas to playing a role, and exposes the recursive exoticisation of the ethnic “other” in late-twentieth century multicultural society. Just as the houseboat is metaphorically blocking Lucas’s leap into the future, the constraints of multiculturalism at the cusp of the twenty-first century are exposed, in Yasmin Alibhai-Brown’s previously-discussed words, as ‘getting in the way of our doing what we need to together – because it speaks not to our shared future, but much more to our past’ (*After Multiculturalism* 11). Multiculturalism as an insular policy of social exclusion between groups is oppositional to the cultural and aesthetic leaps which Evans’s narrative presents us with.<sup>27</sup> Lucas must confront the past, but it is only in sloughing off the hold it has had over him that he can move forward into a new and culturally diverse future. Although black British literature has sometimes been read as ‘reach[ing] back artistically into the European or British past to lay a proprietary claim on English history’ (Arana ‘Sea Change’ 21), this is not what Evans’s narrative

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<sup>27</sup> See the thesis Introduction for a dissection of Amartya Sen’s concept of ‘plural monoculturalism’ and Kenan Malik’s notion of ‘cellular multiculturalism’ as they apply to contemporary black British literary renderings of England, as well as for a longer discussion of Alibhai-Brown’s rendering of multiculturalism.

achieves with its rendering of the Midnight Ballet. To make the leap beyond acquired and proscriptive aesthetics, Lucas is seen to weave together his allegiance to African-American music with his newfound interest in African folk music, as well as traditionally white European aesthetic forms, allowing him to experience a non-constraining, poly-racial and multi-ethnic aesthetic which encompasses his experience as a mixed-race British subject. It is through this alternative articulation of a black British aesthetic that he embodies a re-imagination of black British cultural modes of being, and, vitally, it does not “claim”, but rather invigorates and expands, Englishness.

Lucas initiates his search for Antoney to the soundtrack of African-American “gangsta” rap. Although he extols the virtues of his favourite rapper, “Scarface”, he often argues with Jake about the need for a British rap scene which moves away from American cultural influences. Jake insists that he ‘want[s] the homegrown sound’ (261), a rap music which expresses a black British experience fundamentally different from that of African-American artists. When Jake scoffs that ‘Funky DL ain’t from New York, so why’s he putting on the accent?’ (260), he is exposing a vital truth that African-American experience is neither directly translatable nor adequately reinforced by black British cultural output. Rather than subscribing to Paul Gilroy’s depiction of African-American musical influences being ‘rearticulated in distinctively European conditions’ (*Black Atlantic* 83), Evans challenges ‘the dominance of an African-American narrative in understanding the first-world experience of black people’ (Gunning and Ward 149). Lucas and Jake, in their good-natured sparring over the American vs. British rap scenes, are playing out the notion that ‘contestation and questioning of this received knowledge [of African-American influence] are at least as important as alignment and acceptance’ (Gunning and Ward 153). Here Evans is critically engaging with the question of black British cultural appropriation –

exploring from where black British culture receives its influences, and in what ways such influences engender a false sense of belonging. In response she expands the aesthetic of the novel beyond America, journeying to Jamaica where Antoney first ‘learnt that dancing can make you more than yourself’ (*The Wonder* 35), to Africa through the influence of the other members of the dance troupe, and to Europe with the Midnight Ballet’s tour and the influence of Nijinsky on both Antoney and Lucas. Not only are black British aesthetics expanding across national and racial boundaries, but the “leaps” made between these bearings by Evans’s narrative complexify the received distinctions between race and class. To support himself and later his family, Antoney works as a builder on a new London housing high-rise tower, one which Lucas will eventually come to know as part of his landscape. This pursuit could not be further from the genteel world of continental theatres, orchestras, and classically trained ballet dancers which Antoney aspires to in his dancing career. Antoney has a strained relationship with Simone, who he eventually names as principal in the troupe. Simone is middle-class and classically-trained, and considers herself more knowledgeable than the others. As such, although the only member who is comfortable in the role of ballet dancer, she is ill-at-ease with the troupe itself. In their subversive roles fusing modern and classical, folk and contemporary dance, Antoney and the others function as transgressors of multiple boundaries and problematize the fixity of class and race in contemporary society.

R. Victoria Arana, in the introduction to her edited collection *“Black” British Aesthetics Today*, argues that the overriding feature of the contemporary black British aesthetic is one of ‘purposeful (if not always cheerful) civility’ (‘Introduction’ 3) which represents ‘*real* social dilemmas’ (‘Introduction’ 5, emphasis in orig.). Somewhat contradictorily, Arana argues that a contextual focus on black British writing does a disservice to the artistic qualities of the works, while simultaneously

claiming that this emphasis on dislocation, cultural dissonance, and social realism is the defining feature of black British aesthetics. Similarly, in her essay included in Arana's collection, black British author Valerie Mason-John contends that the current 'aesthetic is influenced by the dislocation of cultures, the rites of passage of our parents to the "promised land" . . . [and] has been influenced by our assimilation into the dominant white culture' (338). Mason-John points to the success of authors such as Zadie Smith and Andrea Levy in exploiting an aesthetic which is 'the acceptable one among the white publishing houses, agents and literary critics' (338), and suggests that it is this "assimilation" which explains the success of bi-racial authors in securing a wider readership. Setting aside for the moment the politicized question of whether it was Diana Evans's status as a bi-racial author which assisted in having her novels published, I would like to explore how the narrative of *The Wonder* can be seen to move away from the paradigmatic social realism and focus on assimilation which both Arana and Mason-John identify.

*The Wonder's* relationship to accepted black British paradigms is clearly stated by Antoney, in his declaration to white Englishman Riley: "Blackness is more than black," he used to say. "Life is so much bigger than black." (*The Wonder* 135). If "life is so much bigger than black", then the reader is left to "wonder" what drives both the characterisation and the context of the narrative itself. It is not, as Mason-John would argue, the struggle of Antoney, Carla, and the rest of the Midnight Ballet to overcome a sense of dislocation. Rather, in their artistic endeavours, they are neither assimilating to nor setting themselves apart from the cultural norms of Britishness. Like her son Lucas almost three decades later, Carla does not seek a reconnection with the migrant experience of her Dominican father. Dominica 'seemed about as far away to her as Jupiter', and she is not drawn to Antoney because 'there was anything in [his] smooth, low-pitched, seesaw voice that made her think of a long-ago best sound'

(113) – rather it is his aesthetic, ‘broad and strong the way men are supposed to be’ (113), that intrigues and beguiles her. Carla is interested not in racial context or history, but in the artistic and physical aesthetic of her chosen partner. One could argue that in the figure of Welsh-Dominican Carla we see the overriding influence of whiteness, as her mother Toreth becomes a guiding figure in both her daughter and grandchildren’s lives, and in some ways stands between Lucas, Denise, and Antoney. However, in Carla and Antoney’s relationship we see not the assimilation of white and black cultures, but rather an alternative genealogy of black Britishness, one which allows for and embraces a poly-racial status. Intrinsicly linked with this alternative genealogy is the alternative history which the *Midnight Ballet* presents to the reader. The problematic received genealogy between old and young, migrant and British-born blacks is revealed through Benjamin and Antoney’s argument during rehearsal. The troupe listens as Benjamin, a middle-aged Nigerian, argues that

“Some of these dances you like to play around with here, they were created *centuries* ago. Hundreds and hundreds of years. Even before slavery, before this country even existed. They are artefacts of African civilisation. They should be protected and preserved.” He looked around the hall for possible allies. “Is it not so?”

Rosina was yawning. Fansa was stretching. Milly shrugged and mumbled that the music was alright with her, while Carla gazed longingly out of the window towards the sound of the steel pans.

(101)

Antoney, Carla, Fansa and Milly do not see the need to ‘protect and preserve’ African culture, and the sermonising by Benjamin on the subject bores and alienates them. For

the younger generation, their work in the Midnight Ballet, rather than promoting a ‘fossilisation’ of migrant culture for which multicultural policy has been blamed, seeks to expand and revitalise aesthetic forms, holding nothing sacred or profane.<sup>28</sup> In placing the Afro-Caribbean dances in a European context (classical ballet), the troupe is already moulding and re-shaping the distinctions between Western and “exotic” forms of art. If this malleability is possible, the blending of diasporic elements of dance is a logical extension of Antoney’s art, which seeks to leap across the distinctions between migrant groups. Suki Ali has argued that mixed-race or multi-ethnic subjects inhabit a multi-locational positionality that ‘allows for complex subject positions to be interrogated from the perspective of transbordered narratives’ (125). Evans’s narrative goes further, allowing all of her characters access to complex subject positions which are transbordered and genealogically entwined, whether black, white, migrant, British born, or multi-heritaged. This complex subject position is exemplified by both Carla and Bluey, who connect across class and background to forge a bond unbroken by their deaths.

Evans complicates her “happy diaspora” by refuting key details which allude to the company’s status as black icons. For one, although the company is named the ‘Midnight Ballet’, the principal dancer Simone tells Lucas that, rather than referring to their status as black performers of a European classical form, the troupe’s name is simply to do with their rehearsal times. In another parallel to Nijinsky’s story, their first tour opens in Paris, the birthplace of the Ballets Russes, and it is to Paris that Carla’s spirit returns after her death at the end of the novel. The company find their only success in Europe, but the experience also puts too great a strain on the young

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<sup>28</sup> Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has referred to the “fossilisation” of immigrant cultures and its implications for community and individual well-being in her text *Mixed Feelings: The Complex Lives of Mixed-Race Britons* (2001).

performers, and the company disbands shortly after their return to London. However difficult the experience of Europe in the novel, ultimately it is through this short, abortive tour that the narrative allows for an expression of what Caryl Phillips has posited as the ‘necessary journeys’ which black Britons must undertake. It is travel, European, diasporic and otherwise, that Phillips concludes allows black Britons’ ‘dual and multiple affiliations [to] feed our constantly fluid sense of self’ (‘Necessary Journeys’ 131). The Midnight Ballet emphasises both the need for cross-diasporic cultural affiliations, but also, crucially, the risks attached to a limited ethnic worldview. Yet, as we have seen, the members of the Midnight Ballet are not engaged in socio-political wranglings over race. The troupe is multi-ethnic, comprising of black African, black Caribbean, mixed-race, and white European members. Rather than the Midnight Ballet functioning as an image of a multicultural vanguard, the troupe instead actively pursues a cosmopolitan aesthetic comprising participants and expression across racial and ethnic boundaries. Just as the choreography leaps between African, European, folk and classical repertoires, so the dancers themselves are disinterested in cultural fixity. In addition, the text advances the notion that, as Bessi and Kemi in *26a* were able to more fully realise their cosmopolitan selves in their interaction with Caribbean as well as Nigerian influences, so Antoney, Benjamin, and The Wonder think beyond the Afro-Caribbean in the narrative of *The Wonder*. Through the narrative preoccupation with their innovative musicianship and choreography the text begins to explore a new, non-normative black British aesthetic, one that breaches received dispensations of blackness and Britishness. That the argument previously indexed between the men takes place against the backdrop of the nascent Notting Hill Carnival (the steel pans which Carla hears in the distance) gestures towards the possibilities contained in their endeavour. The setting also exposes the troupe’s disengagement from the public faces of race and Britishness

being explored at the time, and suggests a non-normative genealogy of black British aesthetics removed from the political.

The narrative inclusion of Nijinsky's classical career and private illness is key to the significance of Nijinsky's "leap" to the non-normative history which Lucas comes to explore through the *Midnight Ballet*. Nijinsky was infamous first for his modern choreography, then for his scandalous affair with Sergei Diaghilev, the founder of the *Ballets Russes*, and later for his public breakdown and schizophrenia diagnosis. But his legacy as one of the greatest modern dancers of the early twentieth century stretches much further, with creative works such as Gerard Dawe's poem 'Nijinsky's Leap', Evans's novel, and the recent eponymous ballet by choreographer John Neumeier exploring his work. Evans's background as a classical dancer may have introduced her to Nijinsky's story. To European audiences, the *Ballets Russes* was considered "exotic", a product of Asia rather than of classical Europe. Indeed, it has been posited that

Nijinsky's transformation into an early icon of alternative sexuality was facilitated by orientalist perceptions and desires on the part of Western audiences . . . Russia itself was encompassed within the barbarously exotic "Orient" of the Western imagination, a view that the company encouraged.

(Farfan 84)

Setting aside the "alternative sexuality" alluded to for now (we will return to this later), the consensus by contemporary reviewers was that Nijinsky always 'appeared to be a race apart, or another essence of ourselves, an impression heightened by his partiality for unusual *roles*, which were either animal-like, mythological, or unreal.' (Cyril Beaumont qtd. in Farfan 76, emphasis in orig.). Russia, with its borders in both



West and East, one boundary in Europe, the other in Asia, was seen to European audiences to house a different kind of European, and no other dancer in the company was scrutinised for the so-called exoticism of his appearance more than Nijinsky (Farfan 84). Like Antoney, then, Nijinsky as an artistic figure is exploited as a sexual exotic.

The significance of Nijinsky's life to Evans' fictional Jamaican dancer Antoney Matheus is slowly unravelled in the narrative. At first glance the two appear to be quite dissimilar. Antoney is a fatherless Jamaican who comes to London at sixteen and begins to dance against the wishes of his mother. His passion for dance has been inspired by memories of seeing the legendary African-American dancer Katherine Dunham perform in Kingston, and he is unfamiliar with Nijinsky's career until he walks into his soon-to-be-mentor Oscar's dance "school" in the basement of a disused Notting Hill church. The inclusion of the turn-of-the-century Polish-Russian dancer in the story of Evans's Jamaican migrant is both enigmatic and of critical interest. Pilar Cuder-Dominguez argues that the inclusion of Nijinsky in *The Wonder* functions as a symbol of white success for Antoney, the unobtainability of which leads him into his own eventual madness ('My father's garden' 2014). Yet in her interweaving of the two dancers' narratives, I argue that Evans instead implies a complex connection between the two figures, one which incorporates not only African or American black Atlantic culture, but also a European sensibility which rejects the idea that to be non-European is to be "exotic", alien, Other. Nijinsky is hero-worshipped by Oscar, Antoney, and eventually Lucas, but it is not the unobtainability of his whiteness which causes them to splinter, but rather their identification with his position as a subversive, an outcast on the edges of acceptable society. Nijinsky signifies the difficulty of heteronormative aesthetics in accounting for a wide range of experience. He acts as a compass-point for difference, facilitating the ideological leap

that others will take towards a black British aesthetic which encompasses alternative sexualities as well as poly-racial cultural stimuli.

In positing an alternative genealogy of black British aesthetics, the novel signifies both black and British communities as unable to accommodate those who fail to conform to the dominant heteronormative discourse. Oscar, the ageing dance teacher who is rumoured to be bisexual, disappears one day never to be heard from again. Riley, whose homosexuality is recognised by others but repressed by himself, fails to pursue a fulfilling romantic relationship, which only adds fuel to his unhealthy obsession with Antoney. Fellow black British writer Bernardine Evaristo's most recent novel, *Mr Loverman* (2013), opens with an epigraph quoting African-American author James Baldwin: 'Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced' (*Loverman* np). On the surface this epigraph appears to apply to the protagonist, seventy-four year old Jedidiah Walker, as he grapples with the illicit gay affair he has carried on with for decades, and begins to move towards living his sexual life out in the open for the first time. However, in the backlash he faces from his first-generation migrant community, the novel also contends with the lived reality of the silences around "deviant" sexualities in the Afro-Caribbean community. While the community is beginning to make in-roads in confronting the presence of openly gay Afro-Caribbean men and women, it is obvious from multiple narratives of alternative black British sexuality that there is still some work to be done in "facing" the lived reality of being both black and gay. Twenty years before the publication of *Mr Loverman*, Kobena Mercer addressed the complexities of racialized homosexuality in his 1994 cultural study *Welcome to the Jungle*. Mercer's work investigates the 'consumer-oriented character of the metropolitan gay subculture' (133), which, he argues, perpetuates white privilege by casting the black male homosexual in the role of the 'sexual "savage"' on the one hand, or the delicate, fragile

and exotic “oriental” on the other’ (133). Mercer argues for the need for a transformation of black attitudes towards gay and lesbians, condemning the view that homosexuality is a “white man’s disease”, unnatural and shameful to the black community. While times have progressed since the publication of *Welcome to the Jungle* in the mid-1990s, as novels such as *Mr Loverman* and *The Wonder* highlight, there is still much work to be done to recognise and transform the attitudes towards homosexuality, and to expand the ‘limits of tolerance’ (Mercer 158) in the black British community.

In placing Antoney within a troubled narrative of sexual attraction, Evans, too, touches upon the problematic dialectic ‘between representation and social interaction’ (Mercer 136) introduced by Mercer and incorporates it into her non-normative aesthetic. Unable to reconcile his desire for both sexes, and distraught at the prospect of his life going ‘small’ (*The Wonder* 183), Antoney eventually succumbs to a mental illness not dissimilar to that of his idol Nijinsky, who himself was involved in love affairs with both men and women. Early in the novel, the similarities between Nijinsky and Antoney begin to be solidified. In addition to his obsession with the performance of flight, Antoney affects a fifteen-minute muteness before every performance of the *Midnight Ballet* (a habit of Nijinsky’s revealed to Antoney by Oscar), and later begins to experience intermittent mental breakdowns on the European tour. It is intimated that his mentor Oscar is sexually attracted to him, and his intense friendship with the dance critic Riley culminates in a brief and destructive sexual encounter. Riley’s tentative sexual advance towards Antoney, attempted while both men are in a state of heightened mental anguish, destroys the relationship between them. Yet even in this abortive sexual moment, Antoney and Riley are subverting the constraints of both racial and heteronormative behaviour. Writing about what she terms ‘a switchpoint between black and queer’, Kathryn Bond Stockton hypothesises that black and white

men who share a sexual attraction are engaged in ‘intimately sharing their signs with each other if not always their actual bodies, [as] they engage in (what they consider) shameful attractions and struggle with their attraction to shame’ (151). While Stockton reports that this type of shame often results in violence, this is not the case for Antoney and Riley. Working against the reader’s expectation that a virile young Jamaican man would react violently against the advances of a much older Englishman, the narrative allows a more complex rendering of the confused sexualities at play. The friendship is ruptured, yes, but it is a silent rupture, with Antoney slipping out into the night before Riley wakes. The reader is left to “wonder” whether, caught in the midst of multiple breakdowns – financial, artistic, psychological, familial – Antoney is somewhat comforted, if not aroused, by Riley’s attentions. Riley is a problematic figure to extend support to Antoney, as his exoticising gaze fixes on the dancer as a ‘dusky Adonis’ (135), sensationalising him for the underground gay presses of the era. Yet Evans’s inclusion of this seemingly incongruous plot-point problematizes the taboo of homosexuality in the black Caribbean community, as well as highlighting the difficulties faced by both blacks and whites who exist outside of the heteronormative. Riley, who can be seen to play the part of the “respectable homosexual”, lives his whole life without a fulfilling romantic relationship and so effectively ostracises himself from the community in much the same way as the mentally ill Antoney. Once the protective aesthetic of the Midnight Ballet is stripped away, those associated with the troupe struggle to live within the constraints of acceptable behaviour, and this proves to be destructive.

Although Nijinsky’s sexuality is never referred to in the novel (only his mental illness), it is well-documented that the dancer engaged in a sexual relationship with his the founder of his troupe, Sergei Diaghilev. Alexandra Kolb argues that to Western European audiences at the turn of the twentieth century, ‘Nijinsky’s association with

Russia branded him as an uncivilised, instinctual, exotic, semi-carnal and sexually liberated being' (155). Kolb argues that this exoticisation of the Ballets Russes had a liberating effect – they 'could explore unorthodox sexualities and subversive gender attachments more freely, without experiencing the social constraints imposed on other European nationals' (156). While the tone of Kolb's argument elides the complexities of Western "Orientalism", it is fair to say that Nijinsky's career capitalised on the expectations of audiences, whom he would present with a savage, erotic, yet at the same time effeminate, choreography. This capitalisation is echoed in Evans's narrative by Riley's reviews of the Midnight Ballet. Antoney is aware of this particular marketing, and plays up to the expectations of himself as a precocious, exotic talent. Kolb's analysis of Nijinsky's ballet 'The Faun' concludes that it 'was not a triumphant celebration of male rationality, but portrayed man, quite in keeping with the anti-civilizatory tendencies of the time, as a figure of nature bearing instinctual and affective traits, rather than cognitive and culturally imposed ones' (161). This idea of *affective* rather than *cognitive* traits is one which the narrative of *The Wonder* explores with Antoney and Oscar's establishment of the Midnight Ballet. During an argument over his appropriation of traditional Afro-Caribbean dance blended and utilised in a contemporary form, Antoney is frustrated at his fellow dancers' lack of vision, complaining that 'he was making flight, that was all. Run, leap, float, turn. What did it matter, a Kumina walk or a jump from Senegal? Why did it matter the languages he chose?' (102). Here Antoney not only seeks to break down the barriers of aesthetic form, but also the boundaries between members of the African diaspora. Antoney seeks to incorporate leaps into not just the physical act of dance, but also in the psychological barriers between members of both the African diasporic and European communities.

Eventually, this transgression flounders. The troupe is disbanded, Carla suffers an early and unexpected death, and Antoney disappears after suffering a nervous breakdown. When Lucas gains access to the truth that Antoney ended his life in a Jamaican mental institution, he reads a letter sent to Riley which gives voice to the traumatic effects of subversion. Antoney writes,

*I am a living man. I am not a madman and I don't want you to think like my mother that I don't know myself. She is ashamed of me, but I am not wicked. I am not the devil. I am making a new dance and practising it in the garden . . . My soul is whispering to me and telling me what I am . . . Shango is inside me telling me what I am.*

(269, emphasis in orig.)

Antoney is concerned that his artistic voice will be lost through his incarceration in the institution. The reader is aware that at the time of the letter being written, the two children have been told that Antoney was deceased. The narrative of the absent father is here delivered a complex rendering. In Antoney's plea from Beaumont, '*I am not a madman*' we see not only the plight of the failed artist struggling to redefine himself, but also the struggle for visibility that the socially transgressive face. Antoney's sexual deviance and artistic arrogance estranges him from both the wider community and his children. Indeed, when Lucas reads his father's letter, he destroys Riley's office, reinforcing the shame that surrounds the non-normative. However, Antoney's words provide the 'full picture' (205) for which Lucas has been searching. It is the voicing of that which had been considered taboo that affords the narrative its centralising of the non-normative. Here Evans's narrative does not perform an act of remembering

or of historicising black Britishness, but instead allows for an expansion of acceptable norms within black British communities.

The fates of The Midnight Ballet players expose the psychological consequences of engaging in what the wider community judges to be unacceptable modes of being. The members of the troupe are inspired by, and reflected in, a wide range of paradigms which leap across the boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and background. Evans's narrative is unique in that spans the breadth of the twentieth century as Lucas, expecting on one hand the imminent arrival of the twenty-first century, simultaneously looks backwards through the twentieth century to Antony and Nijinsky. However, it is not with the "claiming" of these histories that Lucas's narrative is concerned. He identifies no more affiliation to Jamaica than he does to Russia, nor to his father than his father's idol. The novel warns instead of the danger of cultural stasis, of communities fossilised by their unwillingness to adapt new spheres of influence into their aesthetic output. Lucas and Denise resist this fossilisation by moving on, Denise to a small flat with a window box, and Lucas to another journey, this time geographic rather than historical. In a narrative in which race, class, sexuality and psychological well-being are all complexified, Lucas uncovers a non-normative articulation of black Britishness which projects a new genealogy of black British experience. This genealogy takes the 'sense of [black British] culture as fluid and malleable' (Gunning and Ward 157), and moulds it into an aesthetic which critically engages with a wider range of African, American, and European influences than has conventionally been espied. Like the Garvey House previously populated by black activists in Zadie Smith's *NW*, Evans's imaginative creation of the Midnight Ballet presents the reader with an account of black British experience from yesteryear. However the artistic endeavours of the ballet troupe offer an alternative to the political narratives which black British writing tends towards

when exploring the history of migrancy in Britain, epitomised (however ironically) by the book of pictures of the Garvey House which Felix looks at in Smith's novel. In its representation of an alternative black British genealogy, the *Midnight Ballet* functions as a conduit for Lucas's leap into an imaginative, poly-racial future. By situating this alternative genealogy of black Britishness, the narrative allows Lucas to leap backwards and forwards, out of paradigmatic constraints. As Lucas attempts this figurative leap, he contemplates two symbols of the past and future, in which '[Silver's] engine and the shoe were opposing objects. One went forward and the other went back. He threw the shoe into the canal to join the *Midnight Ballet* museum' (309). Lucas has no need for objects which tie him into a certain mode of being, and so he chooses to use the past to propel himself into the future (the boat). When that endeavour fails, the propeller literally cleaving from the engine and falling into the canal, Lucas is undeterred. The ability that the past has given him to remove constraints allows him to change course and to continue his journey forwards, leaping from an alternative past into an alternative future. In pushing beyond our expectations of the black British, the poly-racial aesthetic of *The Wonder* allows for an unconventional articulation of artistic intent, vitally re-examining and expanding contemporary black British paradigms.

In the complex narratives of Diana Evans's two novels, her characters occupy a multi-locational positionality that emphasises the plurality of contemporary social structures. Her narratives emphasise transcultural, rather than discrete generational, affiliations, and in doing so posit a new space to be occupied by black British subjects. In exploring European modes of being spliced with Afro-Caribbean influences, Evans's work reinvigorates an articulation of black Britishness which protests 'the confining nature of socially constructed racial categories' (Mahtani 176). In doing so her work also refutes what Les Back and Anoop Nayak have identified as the danger,



in contemporary Europe, of 'black' and 'European' modes of belonging 'being reproduced as mutually exclusive categories' (Back and Nayak 4). While working to entwine these two categories rather than separate them, Evans's work simultaneously warns against the over-essentialism of black subjectivities. Jacqueline Nassy Brown warns that '[the term diaspora's] ostensible inclusiveness is the source of its potential to negate. The association of diaspora with worldwide black kinship, as it were, can actually render certain kinds of black subjects, experiences, histories, and identities invisible' (201). She argues that black Europe 'points outward in many ultimately unmappable directions' (Nassy Brown 209). However, in concluding that to fully conceptualise black Europe one must locate the disparate encounters between black communities in a global context, I would argue that Nassy Brown returns us to the theoretical discourse of the diaspora she warns against. Instead, in the fiction of Diana Evans the 'ultimately unmappable directions' of black Europe crucially crisscross various compass points and posit trajectories of travel (actual and aesthetic) for the black subject which involve a variety of ethnic and social boundary crossings. In so doing, the writing of Evans (and Evaristo, to whom we turn next) begins to chart the emergence of a new black British aesthetic of transcultural affiliation beyond familiar models.

## Chapter Four

### Trajectories of Multi-Axial Englishness in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and *Soul Tourists*

In the work of the authors studied so far, it is possible to chart a new direction of black British writing – one which repositions the locus of subjecthood away from the black Atlantic and re-orientates it in relation to European, transcultural trajectories. As we have seen in the work of Phillips, Smith, and Evans, these new trajectories are expressed through the localised cosmopolitanism of the narratives, and formulate a new aesthetic of black British writing which is multi-locational, transcultural, and rejects accepted genealogies of black Britishness. Michael Gardiner argues, in his work *The Return of England in English Literature* (2012) that, historically, English literature as a discipline has functioned as ‘an absorptive, universalizing principle dependent on displaced and ideal images of England for the ends of empire and social class and has been disastrously antagonistic to national experience’ (1). This absorption with a creation of a “universal” Englishness led to what Gardiner refers to as a “stretching” of English literature outwards beyond England itself – first to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and later across the empire. He contends that it is only since the diminution of England as a world power that ‘Englishness has become local, experiential and national again’ (1). Gardiner maintains that it is through this very provincialisation that Englishness begins to allow for an inclusive, internationalist subjectivity (2). As I explored in my reading of Caryl Phillips’s fiction in chapter one, Phillips’s writing engages with an evolving sense of Britishness – one which, ultimately, I argue, leads him away from Britishness and towards a concern with Englishness. It is this concern with Englishness that I seek to explore further as I turn to the work of black British author and poet Bernardine Evaristo.

In his essay 'Extravagant Strangers', Phillips argues that the reification of race as an exclusionary force is

important to me only insofar as one has to acknowledge that being *visibly* the "other" will only serve to intensify the feeling of being outside. It is, of course, in British society, possible to feel alienated by dint of accent, by class or even by regional affiliation. In short, race is simply the most *visible* sign of alienation and one which, unlike the other forms, cannot be denied.<sup>29</sup>

(290, emphasis in orig.)

Phillips points out that race, when placed alongside these other socially coded markers of difference, is one in a multitude of identity markers. In so doing he positions race as relational to specifically English axes of belonging – those of local and economic affiliation. If British identity has been predicated upon both universalising principles (as found in Gardiner) and exclusionary practices – those of class and regionality as well as the racial – then Phillips's later work, as I have argued, contends with this by moving away from black British subjectivity by particularising the importance of Englishness to an establishment of self. Stephen Clingman convincingly argues that Phillips's writing is concerned 'not in race as the essential sign and substance of the outsider's identity, nor a flattening of all outsiders in some formulaic manner, but an interest in all those asymmetrically marginalised' (*Grammar of Identity* 76-7). I would augment Clingman's reading of Phillips's oeuvre by arguing that, in his recent fiction, he allows for an expression of black Englishness which, while vexed and incomplete,

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<sup>29</sup> This essay, taken from Phillips's edited collection of essays *A New World Order* (2001), shares its title with his anthology of British writers born outside Britain, *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* (1997), published four years previously.

posits black English belonging as integral to transcultural exchange. In a related vein, I position Evaristo's narrative concerns in the novels presented here as similarly predicated on a particularly English subjecthood which correspondingly refutes the essentialisation of race, and posit that in doing so her work locates black Englishness *within* rather than *outside of* European locations of belonging. The location of her protagonists in relation to England as they focalise Europe turns the axis of black belonging away from the Atlanticist model. In so doing, Evaristo reconfigures a black Englishness which looks to multiple locations of belonging inclusive of European genealogies.

The author of eight fictional texts, Evaristo's distinctive style of mixing poetry and prose in her novels is formally inventive, realising a singularly expressive aesthetic form. As my readings will show, the narrative concerns of her work expand the locus of black British selfhood beyond the black Atlantic, revitalising conceptions of black Englishness in relation to a transcultural European subjectivity. In her narratives, the multidirectional connectivity of her characters across cultural, geographic, and historical boundaries allows them simultaneously to inhabit diverse locations of being. I will argue that these multiply located subjectivities are presented as constitutively English and constellated along an axis of belonging which allows for a conceptual reading of what I term *multi-axial Englishness* in her work. In order to illustrate what I identify as a move towards a multi-locational constitution of Englishness, I will look first to Evaristo's 2009 revision of her debut novel-in-verse, *Lara* (1997). I argue that the revision of Evaristo's narrative indexes the evolving concerns of black British writing and as such the text evidences an imaginative reconstruction of Englishness. The parallel narratives of migrant histories mapped in the revised edition, as well as Evaristo's triangulation of England with Africa and South (significantly, not North) America, is a rejection of the privileging influences

of African-American experience envisioned by Gilroy's black Atlantic, and the failure of the black Atlantic to adequately account for the myriad histories of multi-locational subjects. It is my contention that Evaristo's recent novels, in charting a new European trajectory of travel for the black English subject, achieves just this relinquishment of a narrowly ethnicised constellation of Englishness. My reading will draw on contemporary conceptualisations of Englishness to locate both *Lara* (2009) and *Soul Tourists* (2005) as concerned with expressing the multipositionality of their subjects and the inadequacy of the parameters within which we approach black British writing.

Evaristo claims that her passion for the multiple black European histories 'which have been lost, forgotten or deliberately overlooked' was the impetus for writing her 2005 novel *Soul Tourists* ('CSI Europe' 3). *Soul Tourists* imagines a reclamation of black histories in which the direction of travel is not across the familiar triangulation of the black Atlantic, but rather east, across Europe. The novel's black British protagonists, Stanley and Jessie, embark on a road trip across the continent in the late 1980s, encountering the "ghosts" of black European history along the way. I will argue that this journey is not a return to Englishness, or even to the European – Stanley and Jessie part acrimoniously in Kuwait and their journeys are never completed – but instead, one that seeks tenuous cultural connections across the lines of national boundaries and accepted histories. As such, I argue that Evaristo's narrative posits an affiliative connection to Europe and, in so doing, articulates a new kind of black European selfhood for black Britons such as its protagonists.

In 1997, Evaristo's debut novel-in-verse, *Lara*, was published to critical acclaim. It gestured towards a "story" of black Britishness with which to build upon the legacies of post-war migrant writing. As already explored in my introduction, the publication of a revised and expanded form of the novel in 2009 reworked the story of a generation of black Britons whose sense of belonging in Britain and Europe is

itself still evolving. In the decade between the two publication dates, British multicultural policies came under increased political and social scrutiny and the “happy multicultural land” envisioned by the political classes arguably failed to transpire as communities appeared to become increasingly divided along ethno-religious lines across both England and the wider European continent.<sup>30</sup> In turn, Evaristo’s narrative, in its revised edition, became a more nuanced telling of race and heritage, in which the European was held up alongside the African. While still a novel in the *bildungsroman* tradition identified by Mark Stein, with the 2009 edition, Lara’s 1997 ‘cross-Atlantic clarion call’ is re-imagined to fully realise her mixed-race, multi-heritage construction of belonging which goes far beyond the particularities of the black Atlantic (P. Murray 38). In her inclusion of a revised and expanded exploration of Lara’s Irish and German maternal heritage, the modification of the novel gives dramatic voice to the changing face of black British writing in the first decade of the twenty-first century. I will suggest that this change permits a reading of displacement and discrimination through the text – one that ultimately feeds into a multi-axial conceptualisation of Englishness. Specifically, I read the narrative as going beyond accepted paradigms of racialised identity often announced in terms of a homogenously rendered Britain or “Britishness”.

Recently, scholars have begun to investigate theories of Englishness, and the so-called “revisions” of Englishness expressed in the aftermath of Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish devolution. Andrew Mycock has argued that opposition to the

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<sup>30</sup> See Kenan Malik’s work on the legacies and difficulties of multiculturalism, *The Meaning of Race* (1996) and *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009). In addition, there have been multiple works in recent years exploring the limitations of multiculturalism in a post-9/11 and 7/7 frame. These include *Terrorism and the Politics of Response: London in a Time of Terror* (2008), eds Angharad Closs Stephens and Nick Vaughan Williams, *Terror and the Postcolonial* (2010), eds Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, and *Community Cohesion: A New Framework for Race and Diversity* (2005), by Ted Cattle.

historic dominance of English culture over the formation of Britishness ‘can overlook the pragmatic and mutually beneficial nature of British multinationalism’ (16). He argues that

[t]he English nation and state were from their inception simultaneously national, multinational, and transnational; a clearly defined national territory whose political and cultural borders were fluid, porous, and progressively reformed by British civic and ethnic multinationality and the concurrent experiences of empire.

(Mycock 18)

The multinationality of Englishness that Mycock identifies – historically linked to the fluidity of English, Scotch, and Welsh borders, and the flow of peoples across those borders, as well as to the migrancy inherent in empire-building – rejects the supposed hierarchy of birthplace or ethnicity in establishing cultural links. Subjecthood, in relation to the English nation, can be expressed in and through the links formed across multiple locations and sites of reference. This multi-referential Englishness allows for an expansion of the specifically nationalist boundaries of England. Rather than referring to the multinationality of Englishness, then, I find that redefining the conception of Englishness as *multi-axial* is a more competent terminology for the paradigm I find in contemporary English writing. Multi-axial Englishness is informed by multiple trajectories of cultural reference and influence, and is conversant with the historic and on-going movement of peoples both into and out of the national boundaries of the nation state. I look to John McLeod’s recent work on ‘post-British England’, in which he states that ‘a post-British England requires the relinquishing of Englishness as ethnically or racially exclusive’ (‘Black British Writing and Post-

British England' 187). In order to be post-British, there must be a recognition of the multinational influences within England, and distinguish that these influences stem from both inside and outside England's national boundaries. As such the English are freed from the containment of imperial Britain as definitive or exclusionary. Michael Gardiner's work has been of great importance in defining an English literature in which post-imperial 'provincialisation does not "shrink" England to leave a diminished power, it allows England to emerge' (7). In the short decade that followed the first publication of *Lara*, I argue that Evaristo's narrative does indeed inform a new consciousness of Englishness beyond cultural expansion, in which multiple trajectories trace both voluntary and involuntary movement of peoples and histories. This narrative trajectory involves what Gardiner argues is an evident turn in English literature that 'aims at a diversity which is comparative and internationalist, precisely because it is specific to, and eventually institutionally accountable to, a place' (2). These multiply located trajectories lead to the imagery of the globe spinning on multiple axes of movement, yet anchored in a specifically English locality. I would like to draw upon this imagery to highlight a newly emergent multi-axial conceptualisation of Englishness in Evaristo's narratives.

As previously noted, with the 2009 edition of the text, the original narrative which, in Patricia Murray's view, leads to 'racial constructions that only partially give her voice' is re-imagined to better realise Lara's mixed-race trajectories (P. Murray 45), which extend far beyond the black Atlantic. The new expression of multi-locational Englishness that I identify builds upon, but also, I contend, radically differs from, the legacy of black British thought which came to the fore in the 1980s and 90s. Paul Gilroy's opening lines in his 1993 work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* acknowledge that



striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual.

(1)

Gilroy immediately references the African American writer W.E.B. Dubois as his intellectual forebear by grounding his theory of the black Atlantic in Dubois's theory of the double consciousness necessitated by the heritage of slavery. To Gilroy, the double consciousness required by black Europeans is specific in that the cultural legacy of slavery and Jim Crow is absent, allowing for a differential space of cultural negotiation for the black Briton. Yet Gilroy's text is insistent on connections to African American markers, arguing that black Britons come to a sense of modernity through black US cultural output – namely hip hop and post-Civil Rights era writing. In contrast, Evaristo explicitly links the memory of slavery and Lara's growing articulations of difference with her triangulation in the text of London-Lagos-Manaus and, in so doing, consciously rejects the United States as primary cultural identifier. Whilst the text maps the importance of the Atlantic and indeed, as we shall see, of crossings, these Atlantic crossings function to reposition Lara in relation to a far more complex and multivalent subjectivity than Gilroy's black Atlantic, with its focus on North American influences, seems to allow.

When writing about Evaristo's relationship to Gilroy's black Atlantic in reference to her earlier work *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), Katharine Burkitt argues that 'Gilroy's formulation of the black Atlantic as a single, complex unit of analysis' is questioned by the positionality of Evaristo's protagonists as between and across national identity (100). Expanding on this, Burkitt argues that

Gilroy's paradigm is not the same as Evaristo's: for instance, no more can Zulieka [the protagonist of *The Emperor's Babe*] be accommodated by a single notion of national identity and so for her, "the black Atlantic" fails, too. Furthermore, Evaristo's sense of collectivity is not racially or ethnically determined the way that Gilroy implies.

(100)

This failure of the black Atlantic adequately to account for the histories of multi-locational subjects is also signified by the varied narrative perspectives of *Lara*, and in particular its expanded European narrative in the revised edition (2009). The narrative evocation of the protagonist's rejection of racially and ethnically determined collectivity is key – Lara wishes to participate in her community as a black English woman, but these are narrow and constricting terminologies when applied to her multiple racial and ethnic histories. As such, Evaristo moves her protagonist into spaces of in-between with her physical crossings to Africa and South America. These crossings do not exclude her from the boundaries of the nation, but instead highlight the importance of the multiple trajectories upon which she builds her relationship to England. With the revised edition of *Lara*, the text is concerned with adequately expressing the multipositionality of contemporary Englishness, and with how multiple axes of influence can redefine the parameters of black English writing.

Furthermore, the geographies through which Lara travels on her triangular journey echo what Carol Boyce Davies and Babacar M'Bow have described as 'the relocation and redefinition of African peoples in a range of international locations' through voluntary, forced, and induced migrations across the centuries (Davies and M'Bow 14). With the expansion of this ancestral crossing to include memory traces

of Lara's Irish and German forebears, Evaristo retains an emphasis on the character's blackness while also balancing that blackness alongside the European. This opens up a different kind of double consciousness and redefinition than the one envisioned by Gilroy, Davies and M'Bow. As a result, the recognition of one trajectory of Lara's ancestral heritage need not result in the devaluing of the others. The 1997 version of *Lara* has already been read as a 'revisionary project', as the critic Mark Stein posits that 'it tries to rediscover and remake connections that have been lost in history' (89). However, with the 2009 republication of the text, Evaristo expands not just the histories of her protagonist, but also the paradigms with which we have attempted to read her. Once Lara has mapped the geographies of her multi-locational perspectives, she is able to 'step out of Heathrow and into my future' (Lara 2009 188), one which is not bounded by self-consciously racialised constructions, and which expresses her Englishness as both varied and multi-axially located.

Evaristo's text is concerned with the story of Lara, the fourth of eight children born to an Anglo-Irish mother and Nigerian father. We are provided access to the reminiscences of various ancestral characters on both Lara's paternal, and later in the revised edition, maternal, sides before Lara takes over the narrative herself. Lara's early life is marked by the silence of her father regarding his heritage, as he makes no effort to connect her to her paternal family. As Lara reaches adulthood, she travels first to Lagos and then to Manaus in Brazil in order to research her ancestral history. Guided by the Yoruba proverb which serves as the novel's epigraph – 'however far the stream flows, it never forgets its source' (2009 8), Omolara (whose name means 'the family is like water') moves across bodies of water in order to connect with the migrant past of her forebears. First retracing her father's voluntary migration to England in the 1950s, later she follows the forced migration of his slave ancestors as they were moved from Nigeria to Brazil and back again, returning to Nigeria

following emancipation. The inclusion in the new edition of her maternal Irish and German ancestry expands Lara's physical journey beyond the cultural referents of the black Atlantic, empowering her to return to England with a nascent sensitivity to the manifold trajectories which inform her own Englishness.

In order to extrapolate the interconnected nature of Evaristo's narrative, and to read the revised edition of *Lara* as reclamation of black English European self, I will analyse a range of key moments in the text. In examining both the changes and continuations between both editions of the text, I highlight the emerging paradigmatic shifts of the contemporary epoch. In unearthing the multiple trajectories of Lara's heritage, Evaristo refutes the geographic spaces of "unbelonging" so frequently ascribed to black British fiction. I am keen to counter the critique of hybridity theory that it 'validat[es] experiences of diaspora, migration and cross-cultural exchange, and overlook[s] the oppressions and conflicts which persist in these contexts' (Stouck 93). Far from glossing over the conflicts which emerge around cross-cultural exchange and multi-localities (which complement additionally the multi-nationality of Englishness), *Lara* brings those conflicts into sharp relief, positing the emerging paradigm of multi-axial Englishness which my reading will address. Similarly to Vadrana Velickovic, I approach my reading of *Lara*, and later her 2005 novel-with-verse *Soul Tourists*, as 'engag[ing] with the British-born black "generations" and their experiences of (un)belonging to the national, "originary" racial and generational lines of belonging' (66). Like Velickovic, I see Evaristo's texts as complicating the idea of Africa as "'originary" homeland' for the culturally embedded non-migratory generations of black Britons. To Velickovic, the novel's fractured narrative 'creates a tension between what memory represents for each generation; between Lara's longing for memories and their painful and traumatic nature for previous generations' (73). Yet I shall take this reading further, arguing that the tension created in these moments

of memory reconstruction, far from being fractural, allows for a linking of the pain of the past with the renegotiation of the present. It should be noted that Velickovic's essay, although published after the revised edition of *Lara*, deals exclusively with the 1997 edition. In contrast, I argue that Evaristo's use of Lara's maternal history in the 2009 edition allows for a cross-cultural construction of Englishness which opposes the (un)belonging Velickovic theorises. Crucially, my reading posits the evolution of Evaristo's writing of *Lara* as charting an emerging paradigm of black British writing which is yet to be fully explored – namely, that black Britons, far from being excluded from Englishness, are consciously involved in the revision of Englishness and that, in fact, the literature is conceiving a multi-axial Englishness which includes rather than excludes minority citizens.

It is important, in this exploration of the changes Evaristo wrought on her original work, to acknowledge that the narrative trajectory through Lara's African heritage remains intact in the new edition of the text. As previously noted in my introduction, Evaristo changed the name of Taiwo's slave ancestor from Tolulope to Severina in the second edition of *Lara*. Whilst Tolulope conjured romantic visions of a Yoruban matriarchal figure, 'Severina - the scarred one' (2009 17), is altogether more evocative, bringing to the reader's mind an image of violent, enforced fracture. This is borne out by Severina's sexually sadistic death, executed before the end of her opening stanza, which severs the physical bond between her and her young sons. It does not, however, succeed in breaking the psychological bond with her progeny, as she speaks down through the generations to the family. This linguistic and physical 'severing' of Taiwo's ancestor from her progeny occurs during a brutal rape by her slave master, and the imagery of being 'carried over the ocean' becomes the reader's first link to the tidal waves of continental movement by Lara's family (2009 17). The dense text of the stanza draws the reader into the nightmarish scene of sexual slavery,

as the narrative commences with a lethal scene of colonial memory. This memory, which is 'scenting Lara' (*Lara*, 2009 17), is however one of which no descendant in the remainder of the narrative will speak to or approach. In presenting the ancestral scenes to the reader in this way, Evaristo clarifies the implicit importance of multi-valent cultural trajectories without the need for explicit cultural apology. Severina speaks directly to the reader, recalling

They took me while my boys slept,  
my bones had shivered all day, I could barely think.  
When I bent to work I imagined vultures clawing  
my back. When his men came I heard my bones jangle  
like wooden sticks shaking in a bowl. His chamber,  
sunk in the cellars of that great house, kept for us  
women, only. There he pierced me with a bayonet  
as I lay on a marble slab, bound. My screams  
ricocheted the walls, he ejaculated on my ruptured  
body but by then I had become the fire of a naked torch,  
until he put me out.

(2009 17)

The fractured nature of the form of the text visualises the ancestral rift which occurs on Severina's death. The shockingly violent rupture of Severina's life and death reminds the reader of the degradations of slavery, just as the silence which echoes down through the generations to Lara is a reminder of the elementally shattering force of the Atlantic slave trade. Through the slave master's actions, the narrative gives image to the conceptual knowledge that slavery forcibly silenced and removed

generations of Africans from both their ancestral homes and their genealogical legacies. Severina's spirit is 'carried over / the ocean, burst into life' by the migratory movements of her heirs (2009 17), but her legacy to them will be buried by the force of slavery itself. When Lara finally visits Brazil, she is overwhelmed by the lack of historical knowledge and ability to trace her ancestry and leaves 'not knowing what to look for anymore' (2009 186), as she realises that the name which set her apart in London and Lagos – da Costa – is so ubiquitous as to be meaningless once she follows it to the Latin American country where her ancestors have been buried. In the context of the novel, Brazil is the geographical location in which Lara's story of self-discovery begins and ends, but the discovery itself takes place in the crossings in-between, rather than in the return to national "homelands". In this way Evaristo's protagonist begins to embody the rejection of imagined homelands for the second-generation diasporic citizen, and to open up a space of multi-locational heritage.

A parallel narrative occurs when Evaristo turns to Lara's maternal great-great grandmother, Emma. Similarly to Severina's prologue, Emma's narrative also begins with a death; that of her own, unnamed mother. Emma's tragic birth is set against the backdrop of the Irish Famine, again linking the migrant experience and subsequent obscuration of cultural heritage with the violent practices of British colonial power:

Emma was delivered into her mamai's dying arms  
in a damp cottage in the frozen wasteland of winter

...

Britannia, the Protestant Conqueror, who'd long ago  
throttled Catholic Hibernia between her two

mammoth hands and stamped it to the ground,

did little to help, inventing scapegoats instead.

*Ireland is a human swinery, an abomination,  
a black howling Babel of superstitious savages –*

(2009 31, emphasis in orig.)

Unlike Severina's prologue, Emma's story is presented in couplets, without the ruptured form of the previous narrative. The effect of these couplets is to embed the practices of violence contained in the verse within a distinctly English literary form. The language used is equally cruel and debasing to the Irish subjects as in Severina's narrative – 'throttled', 'abomination', 'savages' – and allows the reader to draw parallels between the differing colonial debasements of the conquered lands. Just as Africa and Brazil have been portrayed as lands of heathens, whose only use was in service to the demands of the empire, Evaristo reproduces the racialised language of the colonies, in referring to the land as a 'black howling Babel of superstitious savages' – a phrase which evokes both biblical and colonial overtones. In this way Emma's narrative functions to connect the multiple trajectories of Lara's ancestry by using the language of the coloniser to explicitly link the racial superiority exerted over colonised subjects in European and non-European countries.

Formally, Evaristo initiates a change to verse couplets in the revised edition. This draws on the success of the form in her second novel-in-verse, *The Emperor's Babe* (2001). The writer's earlier use of couplets, mixed with interloping stanzas to represent different narrative voices in *The Emperor's Babe*, has been described by Katherine Burkitt as being 'self-conscious of the important relationship between literary form and content and highlights the importance of form . . . as it draws parallels between [the] quest for a narrative voice and Evaristo's own search for a



form' (Burkitt 69). Similarly, with *Lara*, Evaristo preserves some of the stanza forms, particularly for the voices of Taiwo and his great-great grandmother, Severina. As with the interceding novel-in-verse, in the revised version of *Lara*, Evaristo allows for multi-varient narrative voices to occasionally break the couplet form and present their narrative in stanzas. This rupture of form echoes the ruptures that are conceptualised as generational silences handed down through both sides of Lara's family. Evaristo has revealed that *Lara* began life as a prose novel, evolving into a novel-in-verse, and that '*Lara* is deliberately fractured; there are multiple voices who take up the story across different time-periods and continents before, in a sense, handing over to other voices, other characters. It's like a narrative relay race' (Hooper 7). This "narrative relay race" allows the author to access memory across the generations of Lara's family, providing the reader with insight into the movements and actions which led to her eventual birth in 1960s London, into what was then a rare interracial marriage. Indeed, the eponymous protagonist does not enter the narrative until page 98, 'born May twenty-eight, the year Nineteen Sixty-two / when England was fast asleep and the moon rose' (2009 98). Rather than Lara reciting the revelatory ancestral past of the first half of the text, the reader accesses them directly through the cast of ancestors Evaristo creates, each ancestor narrating their own tale of oppression and poverty. Lara's birth, 'when England was fast asleep and the moon rose', visualises the slow but irrepressible movement of migrants into England. Lara's Brazilian, Nigerian, Irish, and German ancestors can all be traced back to Europe's colonialism, and to the socio-political movement of peoples across European locations. In structuring *Lara*'s narrative this way, Evaristo presents the multivalent past as immediate and vital to Lara's expression of her own black English subjecthood.

Lara engages in multiple border crossings throughout the narrative of the text. These include both conceptual boundary crossings, in her childhood self-

identification with the physically absent ‘Daddy People’ who she imagines to be her African ancestors, and the physical boundary crossings she engages in as she travels to Nigeria and Brazil in search of those ancestors. Brought up in a chaotic home with seven brothers and sisters, her father Taiwo is an elusive figure, taking on the traditional role of the disciplinarian, and failing to share his history with his children. To Taiwo, Africa is the past, London the future, and he is determined not to burden his offspring with the weight of the past. A young Lara, unconsciously rebelling against the unknowable nature of these histories, ‘summons the Daddy People to appear, / phantoms perched in trees like owls, smiling, singing’ amongst the ‘jungle’ of her overgrown back garden (*Lara* 2009 109). This fairytale-like moment is shattered when her father interrupts her game, and punishes her for her childish behaviour. Lara responds as a child might – to please her father, ‘that night in bed she called the Daddy People to her, / said farewell, and willed them away forever’ (2009 109). In this moment the link which ties her to the African diaspora is broken. With Taiwo’s silencing of the ‘Daddy People’, the severing of ancestral links becomes yet another illustration of migrant experience. Jayne Ifekwunigwe, in her social study of mixed-race families in England, critiques ‘the contested dialectics of Blackness and Whiteness as they delimit constructions of Englishness and the English-African diaspora’ (42), a dialectics which she argues ‘create, explain, justify and maintain social inequalities and injustices; and perpetuate differential access to privilege, prestige and power’ (42-3). Ifekwunigwe asserts that if race is removed as a primary identity marker, then the interplay of other social, geographical, and class markers allows for a more inclusive definition of Englishness. As such, it is the linking of multiple parallel migrant stories through Evaristo’s narrative that points to a redefinition of Englishness across multiple cultural and geographic trajectories.

It is not until Lara is confronted with racism at the hands of her teenaged peers that she starts once again to long for interaction with and understanding of her paternal ancestry, but this does not come at the exclusion of her Englishness. On the contrary, the child Lara looks for a way to include the multiple strands of her lineage within one, inclusive, Englishness. When asked “‘where’re’you from, y’know, originally?’”, Lara innocently replies “‘If you really must know I was born in Eltham, actually’”, but this is not a reply that her childhood companion can fathom, prompting the humiliating response “‘Then why are you coloured?’” (2009 119). This exclusionary, racialised Englishness that Lara encounters as a child begins to be negated through her negotiation of diverse locations of belonging as the narrative unfolds. The manifold European cultures which influence the protagonist are implicitly linked to her physical discovery of the multiple geographic locations of her paternal line. As Lara’s multifarious narrative proceeds, it is portrayed as encompassing multiple levels of generational silence. Lara and her mother Ellen are unaware of the influence of their German and Irish ancestry over the attitudes of her maternal grandparents towards her father Taiwo, yet the reader is made aware of this through the narrative verses of the ancestors Emma, Mary Jane, Louis, and Leslie.

These ancestral connections which complexify and define Lara’s particular Englishness are significantly highlighted in the new edition. When *Lara* was first published in 1997, several reviewers questioned Evaristo’s treatment of her protagonist’s maternal ancestry, namely that she did not delve into the story of her character’s Irish ancestry. Despite the semi-autobiographical nature of the text, Patricia Murray notes that in the original edition ‘the white, working-class woman [Ellen] has no voice in which to tell us of her experience as the mother of black children’ (45). She goes on to muse that Lara ‘may [yet] instigate her own journey into Irishness, an inheritance which remains still to be explored by Lara, and still to

be inscribed into the postcoloniality of London' (P. Murray 46). With the revised edition of the text, this "inscription" of Irishness that Murray looks for begins to be explored. The bulk of the expanded material in the revised edition was concerned with filling in Ellen's "back-story", as Evaristo added a substantial fifty-three pages dealing with both Lara's grandmother, Peggy's, and grandfather, Leslie's, Irish and German heritage. In linking Lara's search for cultural resonance to her Irish heritage, the text acknowledges that 'given the shifting historical, political and ultimately racialised status of the Irish in England, it is quite possible that [Afro-Irish couples] saw their plights as more similar than different' (Ifekwunigwe 44). In explicitly linking the fates of the two colonised peoples, African and Irish, Evaristo further entangles Lara's Irish and black heritages by drawing parallels between Peggy's mother, Mary Jane, and her son-in-law, Taiwo. Mary Jane comes to England to work as a servant and is mistreated through poverty and station because of her Irishness. Similarly, Taiwo comes to England full of the hope of returning to Nigeria a "bigger man", but is forced into a low-paid service position due to racialised attitudes in 1950s England. Taiwo's position is symbolic of Ifekwunigwe's argument that the history of working-class blacks and those of Anglo-Irish descent draws the two groups into a sympathetic inclusivity, which impacts upon the ways in which Englishness might consequently be rethought: as a conduit of cultural entanglement, not as a source of monocultural or exclusive identity.

In addition to the Afro-Irish parallels explored in the 2009 edition, Evaristo also links the mistreatment of German migrants during the First World War to the mistreatment of commonwealth migrants in the post-War period. Ellen's father, Leslie, characterised in the first edition of *Lara* as an ineffectual but loving father, who tacitly condones her relationship with Taiwo whilst her mother condemns it, also has a larger section of the revised edition devoted to his history. Of Anglo-German

descent, the reasons behind his support of Ellen's boundary-crossing interracial relationship are made more explicit, as he declares 'I won't go against what he [my grandfather] stood for' (2009 81). Leslie's grandfather, Louis, is then introduced to the narrative. Louis is a German immigrant who arrives in London in the late nineteenth century. He is relegated to a life of poverty until a charitable organisation gives him a trade, that of baking. He becomes a successful local baker, running his own shop and integrated into the life of the city. This integration into English society is curtailed by the onset of the First World War, when the enactment of stringent immigration laws linked to the growing political unrest in Europe stirred anti-German feeling amongst the population and threatened Louis's position in the community.<sup>31</sup> Despite his longstanding reputation as a businessman, he finds that

Still – locals cross the road at my approach,

rumour I am one of the Kaiser's despised spies

degrade my shutters with 'GO HOME FILTHY HUN!'

shout 'Traitor!' to harass my loyal customers

so that my sweet bread hardens into stale bricks

and for first time ever my ovens get stone cold.

*(They are my neighbours.*

*Over 50 years.*

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<sup>31</sup> For an extensive analysis of the political and social status of German migrants living in the UK during World War I, see *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001) by Jerry White.

*I am known.*)

(2009 90, emphasis in orig.)

It is with the pitiful refrain 'I am known' that the reality of migrant experience in England, irrespective of race, is expressed. This textual moment engages with and evidences Caryl Phillips's argument (referenced earlier) that 'race is simply the most *visible* sign of alienation and one which, unlike the other forms, cannot be denied' ('Extravagant Strangers' 290, emphasis in orig.). When notions of Englishness are threatened, by war or by economic hardship, the 'native' population turn against the migrant or the other, and this "otherness" can be constructed along racial, ethnic, class, or economic differences. Such 'victimhood' nationalism (in Mycock's terms) seeks to reassure the native subject when states of cultural and socio-political stasis are in flux, allowing them to surmise their own ability to 'define the borders of national inclusion and exclusion' (Mycock 19). Louis has, he thinks, fully integrated into English life – he has English sons and daughters, and contributes to his local community. Yet when the war breaks out, and victimhood nationalism becomes apparent, his home, his business, and his personal safety are all threatened. The novel opens a distinction between English society and commerce, and English culture and its imagined community. Despite being a nationalised citizen, Louis cannot escape the anti-German rioting at the outbreak of the Great War. The London German community, 'one of the most extensive and deeply rooted [communities] in London's history' was decimated by the discriminatory practices of the War, shrinking 'by over two-thirds' by 1921 (White 107). As Louis's 'sweet bread hardens into stale bricks', so does his experience of discrimination in the capital harden and disillusion him, cutting him off from the community within which he has spent so long assimilating. The memory of this treatment impacts upon his grandson Leslie, who cannot bring

himself to discriminate against Taiwo as he recognises his overt position of marginality. Taiwo is threatened by the nationalist backlash against post-war migration, just as Louis was threatened by heightened nationalist sentiments during the First World War. In explicitly connecting Louis's experiences to Taiwo's in this way, Evaristo works to displace accepted paradigms of migrancy and nationalism, and exposes the parallel experiences of exclusion by successive migrants. John McLeod's argument that 'to read black British writing as a critique of England rather than its rewriting of Britain' ('Black British Writing and Post-British England' 177) bolsters a reading of *Lara* as contributing to 'shifting meanings of "Englishness"' in its positioning of parallel migrant experiences outside of racial or ethnic boundaries. As such the parallelisation of exclusion inversely allows for an inclusive subjectivity to develop across transcultural boundaries through the figure of Lara.

It is my contention, then, that Evaristo's text consequently captures in literary form a newly defined, post-national mode of selfhood which expresses the need for a multiply located English subjectivity. Lara's narrative is incomplete until she conceptually travels across European cultural histories (and more specifically, her Irish and German trajectories), as well as the physical journey along the slave routes of her African ancestry. Tony Murray's *London Irish Fictions: Narrative, Diaspora and Identity* investigates the role of the Irish diaspora in articulations of the city and, in so doing, theorises the Irish diaspora in relation to Gilroy's articulation of double consciousness in *The Black Atlantic*. Murray writes that

the literature of the Irish in London can be read in a similar way [as black diasporic fiction] with regard to the way migrant identities are constructed by the hegemonic discourses of both Irish and British culture. This is particularly

apparent in the case of second-generation subjects *who appear to live within and between two cultures* at the same time.

(11, emphasis added)

Murray identifies the multi-axial position of the migrant, for whom multiple cultural referents are counter-pointed along ethnic, rather than racial, lines. The appearance of living ‘within and between two cultures’ is not delineated by the personal experience of the migrant, but by the state of being a migrant (or a second-generation migrant) itself. In the case of second-generation double migration, such as with the figure of Lara, the state of being within and between becomes the cultural space which allows for a rearticulation of Englishness itself. Yet even in locating Irish diasporic narratives alongside the established theories of Gilroy, Murray hesitates explicitly to interconnect the two experiences of migration to the cultural articulation of London as a city space. The explicit linking of black and Irish migrant experiences has only begun to be explored in the literature around diasporic narratives of England. The ‘diversity of intersectional identity formations too complex to be bound solely by [postcolonial] parameters’ (T. Murray 11) allow for a reading of migrant and second-generation literature which moves beyond a narrowly national or ethnic lens. This new space is articulated throughout the narrative of *Lara*, as the protagonist journeys literally and imaginatively through the intersections of her ancestral trajectories. Lara’s physical and narrative journey through the multiple strands of her heritage establishes the spaces in-between – the triangulation of London-Lagos-Manaus – as the sites which can accommodate multi-locational subjectivity. This takes Lara beyond the diasporic to a space where she can articulate Englishness as multi-axial, expanding upon the black Atlantic and the centrality of the middle passage to formulations of subjecthood.



Jane Ifekwunigwe's study, referenced above, positions the history of working-class blacks in relation to second generation Anglo-Irish descendants and draws the two groups into a sympathetic proximity which expands the range of cultural experiences and points of contact which are a normative part of English life. The Irish author Roddy Doyle has made similar connections in his recent works of fiction, most notably in the short story 'Home to Harlem', included in his 2007 collection *The Deportees*.<sup>32</sup> Like Lara, Doyle's protagonist Declan does not come to a sense of primary selfhood through this journey, but instead concedes that in being symbolically 'less Irish' through his blackness (Doyle 212), he is in a unique position to explore the interconnectedness of black and Irish narratives. As such Doyle's text parallels the preoccupations of *Lara*, and amplifies the need for a new discourse investigating the intersections of black and Irish narratives.<sup>33</sup> In linking the experiences of minority ethnic groups across racial boundaries, these narratives work to create spaces of connection that ultimately resource multidirectional points of orientation. It is through these multiple locations of Englishness that Evaristo repositions the space of the contemporary black English subject.

With *Lara*, Evaristo recasts the geneological dislocations associated with the Atlantic slave trade and sets them upon a multi-axial diasporic journey. She connects her mixed-race protagonist to wider histories of domination across Europe –

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<sup>32</sup> Declan, the protagonist of 'Home to Harlem', has won a PhD scholarship to a New York City university on the promise of a thesis examining the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Irish literature. Doyle's story briefly maps the changing concerns of the increasingly interconnected diasporic subject of the twenty-first century. Similarly to Lara's experience of choosing to travel backwards across the forced migratory lines of her ancestors, Declan chooses to follow his anonymous grandfather's return to America in order to locate himself within a black Atlantic cultural axis, but, like Lara, he finds that this mapping does not adequately account for the development of his mixed race subjectivity.

<sup>33</sup> For a recent contribution to the study of the intersectionalities of Irish and black literatures, see Michael G. Malouf's *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Poetics*, London: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

specifically the history of British domination of the Irish, and the imperial battlegrounds of First World War. Despite the silences and displacements of their parallel migrant experiences, it is through exploring the interconnectedness of these diasporic histories that the descendant Lara can articulate a new narrative of black English locationality. Lara's triangular journey in the end leads her back to her originary geographical location, London. But the experience of conceptualising herself in movement between the three continents – Europe, Africa, South America – leads her to 'savour living in the world, planet of growth, of decay, / think of my island, the 'Great' Tippexed out of it, / tiny amid massive floating continents,' (2009 188). In *Lara* the nurturing of a new Englishness takes place not within national borders, but in relation to Lara's trajectories of travel beyond national and cultural boundaries – and not just outside, but also within and between those 'massive floating continents'. Consequently, the text allows for a newly emergent expression of post-British England which seeks to redefine the location of Englishness outside an exclusionary, racialised subjectivity.

Evaristo's exploration of a multi-axial Englishness which pursues points of orientation that are not limited to Afro-centric or British cultural markers, but which actively seek European modes of belonging and selfhood, connect her work with my previous readings of both Diana Evans and Caryl Phillips. Phillips's non-fictional texts have extensively explored his vexed relationship with Europe. In the introduction to his 1987 travelogue *The European Tribe*, Phillips explains his motives for visiting the continent:

a large part of finding out who I was, and what I was doing here, would inevitably mean having to understand the Europeans. . . . Reorientating myself

in Britain seemed spurious; the problem was a European one, as exemplified by the shared, twisted, intertwined histories of the European countries.

(9)

In order to locate his black British selfhood, Phillips re-orientates himself along a European trajectory. This repositioning sets European influences in constellation with British, Caribbean, and African modes of belonging. As Evaristo points out in her interview with fellow author Diana Evans in 2005, black modes of being are 'as validly universal as any other experience' ('Diana Evans in Conversation' 33), and as such the search for belonging can be charted across cultural and racial divisions. Phillips's travelogue pessimistically renders the ability of Europe to adequately accommodate an inclusive black presence. Travelling the continent in 1987, he sees little evidence of transcultural exchange and instead identifies a racism located just beneath the surface of everyday interactions. In contrast, Evaristo's novel *Soul Tourists* imaginatively returns her black British protagonists, Stanley and Jessie, to the same year as Phillips's travels, as they encounter a distinctly multifarious Europe while criss-crossing the continent in Jessie's ancient Lada. In *The European Tribe*, Phillips seeks the inextricability of black people in Europe, but finds a Europe 'blinded by her past' ('The European Tribe' 128), and unable or unwilling to re-write its history. By contrast, Evaristo's narratives force the reader to confront that very same unwritten history through the ghostly visitations of historic black figures who lived and died on the continent, and in so doing it advances the multi-axial narrative concerns of *Lara* further towards a new trajectory of black British writing which is concerned with transcultural European modes of subjectivity.

It is pertinent at this stage to return to Michael Rothberg's theorisation of the function of multidirectional memory within multicultural European experience which

I articulated in relation to Caryl Phillips's work in Chapter One. Exploring the intersections of European Jewish and black historic experiences of racialized exclusion, Rothberg writes that 'shared histories of racism, spatial segregation, genocide, diasporic displacement, cultural destruction, and – perhaps most important – savvy and creative resistance to hegemonic demands provide the grounds for new forms of collectivity' (*Memory* 23). As previously noted, Rothberg argues that this transcultural intersection of shared experience across difference is evident in Phillips's work, most explicitly in his novel *The Nature of Blood* (1997), which intersects the narrative of a Holocaust survivor with a re-telling of Shakespeare's *Othello*. While Evaristo's work does not contend with the intersections of Jewish and African diasporic histories, it theorises new trajectories of travel for the black English subject in the narrative exploration of the Irish and German heritage of the eponymous Lara and the ghostly visitations of European blacks to Stanley in *Soul Tourists*. The conceptualisation of black selfhood which arises is therefore oriented by the transcultural intersections which the characters encounter as they engage with European histories and genealogies.

The epigraph to Bernardine Evaristo's 2001 novel-in-verse, *The Emperor's Babe*, quotes Oscar Wilde's statement that 'the one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it' (np). In the acknowledgements to the text, Evaristo thanks historian Peter Fryer, whose 'truly groundbreaking book *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*' was 'where I first learnt that Africans had lived in Britain during the Roman occupation nearly eighteen hundred years ago' (*Emperor's Babe* np). Through her protagonist Zulieka, the London-born daughter of Sudanese immigrants and mistress of the Roman emperor Septimus Severus, Evaristo imagines a 'Londinium' which looks eastward across Europe and is fully implicated in a racially diverse, polycultural history. That this history needed to be 'rewritten', that it was unobtainable before

Fryer's 1984 publication and the 'culture wars' of the late 1980s and early 1990s, speaks to the cultural and historical marginalisation of black British histories. With the publication of *The Emperor's Babe*, Evaristo declared a manifesto of sorts – a need not only to re-write, but also to imaginatively revise the place of black people in the cultural legacy not just of the nation, or of the black British nation, but also of Europe. Rather than tracking the conceptual "black Atlantic" through the narratives of *The Emperor's Babe*, and later, *Soul Tourists*, Evaristo instead imaginatively re-casts the histories of black people in Europe. In so doing, *Soul Tourists* self-consciously refutes 'the prevailing common sense that Europeans are white while non-Europeans are Black' and so works against the conclusion 'that Black and European are being reproduced as mutually exclusive categories' (Back and Nayak 4). On the contrary, the complex intertwining narratives of Jesse, Stanley, and Stanley's ghostly visitations work to integrate black experience in European histories. With *Soul Tourists*, Evaristo not only moves forward formally from her previous two novels-in-verse, by producing a text which incorporated poetic verse alongside a prose narrative, but also imaginatively, as she looks east to Europe to expand the representation of black histories begun with *The Emperor's Babe*. In the novel, her protagonists, Stanley and Jessie, embark on an impulsive and ill-advised road trip across Europe to Turkey, and eventually the Middle East, encountering the "ghosts" of black European history along the way. As my study of the text will show, this journey is not a return to Englishness, or even to the European, but instead, seeks tenuous cultural connections across the lines of national boundaries and accepted histories.

Peter Fryer's account of the history of black people in Britain, published in 1984, opens with an acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in a white writer attempting to account for black experience. The success of Fryer's narrative, in revitalising and rescripting the historical account of black peoples in Britain, would

seem to suggest that his text has overcome such politicised concerns. Over the course of the hefty tome, Fryer traces the presence of black people in Britain back to the soldiers of the Roman Army, through the Elizabethan era, the slave trade, and new Commonwealth immigration, and ends his account with the Brixton riots of 1981. Stanley's lament on meeting his first 'ghost', Lucy Negro, that 'no one resembled me – until now' (*Soul Tourists* 69), is reminiscent of Evaristo's own acknowledgment of Fryer's work opening her eyes to the hitherto hidden histories of black Europeans. In fact, Lucy Negro and Mary Seacole, two of the 'ghosts' whom Stanley encounters, are drawn from Fryer's text. While Fryer was not the first or only historian to uncover the histories of these two forgotten women, acknowledging himself that 'she has only recently been rescued, by Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewjee' (246), the inclusion of the two women in Evaristo's text, and the explicit nature of their dealings with her protagonist Stanley, establish the imaginative trajectories of her novel-with-verse in a tradition begun with the historian's work, and as crucial to the creative account of black Europeans which Evaristo attempts with her novel. Yet, as we will see, Evaristo's text goes beyond reclamation in its narrative articulation of a black European self-hood. When Stanley, exploring Spain for the first time, discovers the Moorish history of the southern regions, 'it made him want to storm up to his history teacher, grab him by the lapels and demand, "Why didn't you tell me about the Moors, Mr Cartwright? Why not, eh, why not?"' (155). With this statement the importance of articulating minority histories to the formation of black subjecthood is foregrounded. Yet, when Stanley sits at the Alhambra, staring out across the sea to Morocco 'where the fingers of one continent reached out so tantalisingly towards the tips of another' (158), he is stirred not to visit Africa, but to return to Jessie, and their journey east. Just as Fryer's historical account of blackness in Britain illuminated a hidden history of the "whitewashed" construction of Britishness, Evaristo's novel two decades later

allows for a newly determined articulation of cultural affiliation which is not bound within diasporic liminalities, but negotiates a new trajectory of European narrative which allows for an articulation of cultural histories relevant not just to migrant Europeans, but to all. In locating these new trajectories, Evaristo produces a writing of affiliation, similar to that posited by Edward Said in his essay 'Secular Criticism'. To Said, affiliation was 'the passage from nature to culture' (21) of texts which are 'worldly . . . a part of the social world, and . . . the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted' (9). Evaristo's narrative move away from the black Atlantic results in an affiliative connection to Europe through which Stanley traverses. Stanley's European journey is intertwined with his understanding of black European histories and, as such, his evolving consciousness is connected to particular historical moments which the narrative draws into an affiliative black subjecthood, divorced from the "natal" black Atlantic.

Whilst the novel does not explicitly link the racially inflected travels of her protagonists with other cultural groups, the exploration of black history which she undertakes with the narrative evidences 'the relationship between different social groups' histories of victimization' that Michael Rothberg explores in *Multidirectional Memory* (*Memory 2*). Stanley's narrative interaction with multiple ghostly histories is, I argue, representative of Rothberg's suggestion that memory, in its multidirectionality, is 'subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative' (3). It is exactly this production of memory across cultural boundaries with which the narrative of *Soul Tourists* engages. Rothberg's argument that 'the dynamics of collective memory and the struggles over recognition . . . continue to haunt contemporary, pluralistic societies' (7), is encapsulated by the imaginative haunting of Stanley by successive historical figures, from Elizabethan prostitutes to Afro-French aristocrats and Arab courtiers. Stanley

cannot come to terms with the Englishness Jessie insists resides in him until he first comes to an understanding of the trans-European cultural memories which inform that Englishness. These memories, in the text, are discovered not in an ancestral African or Caribbean homeland, but from the latent influence of historically marginalised black European figures.

In considering the location of *Soul Tourists* within a twentieth century historio-cultural trajectory, Evaristo's placement of the text's action in 1987 is important to the analysis of its historical resonances. Although Evaristo's protagonists are based in London, no reference is made to the riots of 1981, in which black residents of the city protested against institutionalised racism in the establishment. However ignorant Jessie and Stanley appear to be of the rising tide of political opinion and debate of identity politics which was emerging, basing their story at this moment points to a narrative subconscious of the shift taking place in black British cultural politics at the time. Returning to the chronographical link to *The European Tribe*, Phillips's travels through Europe led to his discovery that 'rather than solving the question of what Europe means to me [as a black Briton], the best I could hope for was that the experience might better define the parameters of my "problem"' (xiii). I will argue in what follows that through Stanley's experience, Evaristo offers one response to the 'problem of Europe' for the black Briton, but I do not presume that *Soul Tourists* consciously engages with Phillips's experience of late-twentieth century European racism. Rather, I identify parallels of expression in her narrative which allow for a contemporary exploration of modes of black European subjecthood. In interweaving her narrative with historical memory and cultural investigation, she allows Stanley and Jessie access to a Europe which was, perhaps, unavailable to Phillips at the time.

In addition, situating the beginning of the narrative in 1987 links the preoccupations of the text to Paul Gilroy's polemical text *There Ain't No Black in*



*the Union Jack*': *The cultural politics of race and nation*, also published that year. Gilroy, who had already co-authored the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' volume *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Anti-Racism in '70s Britain*, wrote that

[t]he oscillation between black as problem and black as victim has become, today, the principal mechanism through which "race" is pushed outside of history and into the realm of natural, inevitable events. This capacity to evacuate any historical dimension to black life remains a fundamental achievement of racist ideologies.

(*Ain't no Black 11*)

For Gilroy, the 'oscillation' he identifies places black subjects outside of historical accountability and reduces their historical significance to that of the perennial victim upon whom history has been performed, rather than an active agent who has influenced and affected the histories in which they have participated. Gilroy argues that without a 'reintroduction of history' (12), a cultural identity free of racial reductions is impossible. While *Soul Tourists* is concerned with re-establishing such history through Stanley's ghostly visitations, in moving Stanley and Jessie east across Europe, headed not for Africa or the black Atlantic, but for Australia, a nation-state with its own problematic colonial and racial histories, Evaristo focuses their journey of discovery not on the diasporic movement of people along a black Atlantic axis, but instead on a different form of movement and transit. Stanley ends his journey looking not to Africa, but across the Arabian sea towards an unfettered global future, one in which he might be more free to re-orient his multidirectional consciousness.

The novel's unearthing of historic Europeans of black heritage utilises Stuart Hall's positioning of the past as 'always constructed through memory, fantasy,

narrative and myth' ('Cultural Identity and Diaspora' 395), rather than being constructed as a component of essentialised identity. In turning to Hall, I am interested in the ways in which his theories of cultural identity can be utilised as 'a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being" . . . far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture, and power' ('Cultural Identity and Diaspora' 394). It is exactly this disavowal of essentialism which I identify as being at work in *Soul Tourists*. In so doing, I challenge Eva Pirker's thesis that 'both in *The Emperor's Babe* and *Soul Tourists*, Evaristo bends the historical material rather extensively in order to fit her "black roots" narrative' (279), as this in itself is a rather essentialised view of the work which Evaristo's narratives performs. If the novel "reclaims" contested histories of black migration and heritage, it is not to fit a diasporic journey through the black Atlantic and towards a reclaimed black cultural identity, but rather to de-essentialise black experience of multi-locational movement. In so doing the narrative highlights the ways in which black subjectivity can be found in all modes of historicity, moving beyond the trope of narrative travel along the Atlantic slave triangle.

*Soul Tourists* explores the relationship and eventual travels of Stanley Williams, a young banker in the City, and the older Jessie O'Donnell, a bartender and entertainer who has come to London from Leeds, and whose estrangement from her only child preoccupies her narrative concerns. Jessie has recently received a Christmas card from her son, telling her that he is now married, with a child of his own, in Australia. She alights on a plan to reconnect with him by driving across Europe and Asia, in order to reach Australia by sea. She convinces a reluctant Stanley, still grieving for his recently deceased parents and with no familial ties anchoring him to London, to accompany her on her redemptive quest. Stanley's connection to Jessie unlocks a dormant side to his psyche, and he begins to be visited by ghosts – first

Lucy Negro, 'whom one authority identifies as Shakespeare's Dark Lady' (Fryer 9), in Jessie's flat, and then a cast of ghostly characters stretching from France across the continent, and ending with "encounters" with Mary Seacole and the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin in Turkey. Stanley is cajoled and lectured by the figures he meets to unearth and understand the legacies of the historical movement of black people across Europe and, while he often protests ignorance to their status and biographies, in the end his eyes are opened to the possibilities which such a history allows him. However, these possibilities are not extended to Jessie, who scoffs at his ghost stories and holds her own, embittered view of the history of black people in Europe, informed by her experience growing up as a ward of the state in Leeds. In Jessie, Evaristo presents us with a figure who foregrounds the painful landscape of Europe. In investigating cultural memory, generational conflicts, and haunting in the text, I will seek to explore Evaristo's engagement changing the trajectories of subjecthood, looking not west, but east, as her characters struggle to locate themselves along the historical axes of Europe. To do so, I will interrogate specific instances in the text of historical ghosting, the dynamics of the relationship between Jessie and Stanley, and the generational conflict between the two protagonists and their fathers.

As Sophia Munoz-Valdivieso has argued in her recent piece on the Shakespearean intertextualities of contemporary black British writing, the historical haunting of Evaristo's novel-with-verse 'questions received notions of the imagined community which is Britain and the larger imagined community of Europe' (462). In particular, Munoz-Valdivieso focuses her reading of the novel on the imaginative invocation of Lucy Negro. While she uses the inclusion of Lucy Negro as an example of Evaristo's 'questioning of white standards of beauty' (462), I instead read Lucy's, and later the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin's, inclusions in the narrative as indicative of the varied cultural and aesthetic influences on European literary

production. Upon witnessing an erotically charged exchange between Lucy and her patron, during which Lucy begs for help to evade Elizabeth I's edict to remove all 'blackamores' from England, Stanley is struck not by the fictional Shakespeare's lust for his black lover, but by the very presence of a black figure in Elizabethan England:

I dreamt another world, magicked into this one.

Lingering at the tail end of the twentieth,  
yet mauling the rotten gut of the sixteenth.

...

Though no one resembled me – until now.

Somewhere, out there, in this great unknown ether

This history, this country, could it really be mine?

(69)

Evaristo blends literary legend with historical fact and embeds black subjects in the canon of English literature and history. As such Lucy Negro is not representative of a marginalised or alternative history, but of an inclusive and multi-locational Englishness. That Shakespeare could have been inspired in his work by an African leads Stanley to reflect upon his visitation, which results in his acceptance of Jessie's proposal to travel together to Australia. In Evaristo's narrative, then, the "other world" of European history is accessible to Stanley in the specific moment of the end of the twentieth century – the moment when identity politics is foregrounded in cultural debate – 'magicked' as it is for him, not by political awareness, but by an unexpected and unwanted spectral occurrence. Stanley does not abandon his Caribbean cultural legacies in order to connect with black European histories; on the contrary, it is through these very cultural legacies that he is allowed access to the spectral pasts of

Europe. His ‘gift’, or susceptibility, inherited from his mother, is reminiscent of Caribbean obeah practices, and another link to the importance of transcultural memory to the historical trajectories of *Soul Tourists*.

Similarly to Lucy Negro’s tale, the inclusion of Alexander Pushkin in Stanley’s narrative allows Evaristo to highlight the buried histories of African influence on European cultural output, and takes aim at what she has identified as the ‘tacit historical practice of presenting prominent individuals of African heritage as conveniently racially neutral, aka white’ (‘CSI Europe’ 3). Stanley comes across Pushkin in Istanbul, as the poet intrudes upon his spectral conversation with Gannibal, Pushkin’s Ethiopian great-grandfather, patronised and freed from slavery by Peter the Great. Again, Stanley displays his cultural ignorance – he does not know who Pushkin, the “father of Russian literature”, is, let alone the fact of his Ethiopian heritage. During the course of this strange, multidimensional, triumvirate conversation, Stanley comes to the realisation that ‘the journey from England, with all its characters and happenings, had not only freed him from the bondage of his early years, but also opened up the history of his country and continent to him’ (239). Evaristo’s narrative presents Europe not as a counterpoint to England, but as a resource. It is through the journey eastwards to Europe that Stanley can situate himself within a narrative history which can lead to a consciousness of his own multidirectionality. His sense of Englishness, then, must be also be rooted in his experience of Europe.

Stanley’s progression from uneager traveller to enthusiastic progenitor of black European histories is a slow one, and his fellow “tourist”, Jessie, is the spur to the changes which take place. Stanley’s initial protestation that ‘it’s dangerous for us driving across Europe’ (51), is disregarded by Jessie, who responds that he needs to ‘[s]top acting like a resident without a permit’ (51). His argument that, despite being

British-born, his parents' immigrant status makes him 'Jamaican first and foremost' (51) prompts a crucial ideological statement, made by Jessie. She eviscerates his stance with the declaration that he is 'just another Englishman, don't kid yourself. You think like an Englishman, walk like an Englishman, talk like an Englishman, eat like an Englishman and most likely you dance like an Englishman. You've spent all your life in England, Stanley, so what does that make you?'"(51). With Jessie's words, the narrative explicitly refutes both the "victimhood" status of black subjects, as well as a specific identity politics which places them outside constructions of Englishness. The emphatic and repetitive statement of Stanley as an Englishman recasts him as non-marginalised, with a subjecthood imbedded in English cultural life. However, while Jessie is at ease establishing Stanley's Englishness, through the rejection of primary diasporic filiation that Stanley imaginatively recasts himself as both black and European. Luisa Passerini, in her essay 'The Ethics of European Memory: What is to be done?' speculates that 'one memory of Europe is dying in its old Eurocentric and hierarchical forms, but another might grow out of the awareness of Europe's mixed origins and of the manifold connections between cultures' (50). Passerini argues that in order to avoid essentialist definitions of the European, the migrant traveller must be included in articulations of cultural memory, as those whose border crossings 'are also transgressing the boundaries between public and private spheres' (51). Again, the narrative refutes the idea that to be black and to be European are 'mutually exclusive' categories. *Soul Tourists* works to situate Europe's 'mixed origins', and in doing so creates a black European affiliation which allows for a new articulation of multidirectional consciousness. In acknowledging and embracing his place as a transgressive boundary crosser Stanley is able to come to terms with his Englishness in a specifically European context.

In investigating Evaristo's narrative search for the east, and specifically Europe, my reading problematises the terminology around diaspora. In chapter three I briefly engaged with Jacqueline Nassy Brown's argument that

[t]he most abused term in the study of Black folks here and there is the very term that describes them: diaspora. The term's ostensible inclusiveness is the source of its potential to negate. The association of diaspora with worldwide Black kinship, as it were, can actually render certain kinds of Black subjects, experiences, histories, and identities invisible. Black Europe's recent inclusion into the African diasporic framework sets it up to represent the newest item in a global catalogue that aspires to exhaustiveness.

(201)

Nassy Brown posits that instead of trying to amalgamate black experience to fit into an already-existing critical category, experiences should be categorised based on a desire for eastern diasporic contact. In her work, Nassy Brown proceeds to 'suggest that reunions can be a rich site of investigation in postcolonial diaspora studies' (205). If we apply this sociological reasoning to *Soul Tourists*, however, the reader encounters the first problem of the diasporic model. Although Stanley and Jessie are travelling across Europe with the aim of reuniting Jessie with her son, this familial reunion never takes place. In the inability of Jessie to reach her son, and in the death of Stanley's father, the novel evinces a sense of genealogical breakage. In fact, Jessie's narrative ends marooned in the Middle East, with the realisation that she cannot travel any further from Europe while she 'cannot legally leave any of these countries without her wheels' (*Soul Tourists* 269). Similarly, while Stanley works through the grief of his difficult relationship with his father, the realisations of his historical presence in

Europe, while spurring him on to continue travelling, mean he ultimately ‘cannot return home. Perhaps not ever’ (282). However, while Nassy Brown argues that black Europe ‘points outward in many ultimately unmappable directions’ (209), I argue that *Soul Tourists* is engaged in a mapping of black Europe through its location of Stanley’s narrative inside Europe, and the construction of a subjectivity that reaches out to him *from within* black Europe’s historical past. On the contrary, the ghostly bodies with whom Stanley engages map the historical resonances and cultural memories of black Europeans upon the cultural histories of Europe as a whole. This is not to say that my reading of *Soul Tourists* acts as a disavowal of the ‘multi-locational positionality’ of diasporic space (Ali 125), or to say that this space is one which is no longer relevant to twenty-first-century articulations of black Britishness. However, Evaristo’s language – Jessie’s insistence on Stanley’s status as an *Englishman*, and her placement of the two protagonists on an Eastern trajectory – articulates an alternative pathway to historical memory and cross-cultural communication. Unlike Evaristo’s earlier novel-in-verse *Lara*, *Soul Tourists* does not posit an articulation of Englishness tied to multiple trajectories of racial heritage, but instead imagines a Europe in which blackness is inherently historical and cultural, regardless of genealogical heritage. It is the historical *presence* of black people in Europe which leads to Stanley’s cultural awakening and renewed anchoring in his Englishness, not personal genealogical ties. With this text, Evaristo moves away from historical narratives by black writers being seen as necessarily indicative of the diasporic, and towards a narrative which is significant in that it theorises a historicity of its own.

The trajectories along which Stanley and Jessie travel are not just historical – they are also genealogical in the sense that the tensions of their family backgrounds are exposed, leading to the interplay between filiation and affiliation in the text.



Stanley's relationship with his father is representative of the preoccupation of much black British writing with the lacks and silences between generations. Unlike Jessie, whose Ghanaian father is a presence in her life only in that he is absent, Stanley's parents, Jamaican émigrés to London in the postwar period, remain happily married until his mother's death, at which point his father Clasford begins to withdraw from life, sinking into alcoholism and depression. The novel opens with Stanley travelling to visit his dying father. Clasford, 'rot[ting] like a carcass of beef' (3), is unable or unwilling to engage with a son whose life trajectory he has attempted to dictate. Although he is eager that his son take advantage of the opportunities afforded to him in England, there is a disconnection between father and son which is never bridged. The repetition of generational silences between migrant fathers and their British-born offspring is present in the narrative, as it was in Evaristo's earlier work, *Lara*. Clasford, though, is not hiding his experience as a migrant from his child, as Taiwo attempted to do in *Lara* – rather, his expectation of fatherhood is what maintains a disconnection between himself and Stanley. Stanley remembers a childhood punctuated by fear of his father's disapproval, and of his violent disciplinarianism, and it is this fear which stunts his ability to connect with his father in later life. Even before his death, then, Clasford is an absentee father, in that he does not nurture his son. The disconnection between father and son spurs Stanley on to explore his connection to Europe, consciously defying his father's foregrounding of the Caribbean in Stanley's cultural awareness. When Stanley meets Pushkin, he finds himself 'spontaneously leaping into an uninhibited skank' (238), yet this latent cultural memory is not enough to reanimate his concern with his non-European, diasporic filiations – instead, he is eager to immerse himself in the Russian histories of Gannibal and his great-grandson. Clasford's inability to reconcile his Jamaican past with his English present does not allow for the transcultural exchange which Stanley

is seeking. It is only in turning away from this broken line of filial connectedness that Stanley is able to participate in an affiliative, multidirectional European community in which his blackness is not exclusive or excluding. Evident in Stanley and Jessie's relationships with their fathers suggests the 'difficulties of filiation' which plague genealogical relationships (Said 17). While Said posited that the 'aridity, wastefulness, and sterility of modern life' led to a Modernist preoccupation with affiliation (17), a natural extension of this argument applies to the narrative trajectories of Evaristo's text. In moving her characters away from the filiative bonds of father and country, and instead locating their 'critical consciousness' in Europe (Said 15), Evaristo allows for an affiliative mode of subjecthood to be articulated. Despite the disavowal of paternal genealogy evident in the relationships of Jessie and Stanley to their fathers, Evaristo's narrative is one of discovery, not loss. Stanley's exile, rather than positing an 'impossibility of return' (Ellis *Writing Home* xv) theorised in filiative diasporic literature, envisions the possibilities allowed by mobility along an affiliative European trajectory.

Returning to the multidirectional nature of Stanley's European awakening, Jessie and Stanley's European travel diary centres mainly on Spain and Gibraltar. The two geographical locations also feature prominently in Caryl Phillips's aforementioned *The European Tribe*. Phillips points out that, despite a recent influx of European migrant workers and British ex-pats, 'eight centuries of Moorish and Arab civilization distinguishes Spain's early history from the rest of Europe' ('A Pagan Spain' 30). Phillips is troubled by what he sees as a regressive ex-patriate articulation of Englishness which excludes him, as a non-white, from identification with them. However, in his attempts to converse with the native Spanish population in Malaga, he sets himself apart from his white compatriots not through his non-whiteness, but through his willingness to integrate and not to take a neo-colonialist

stance towards his presence in Europe. Phillips observes that ‘in Torremolinos the waiters must have at least a smattering of English, as the British make no effort to acquire any Spanish’ (‘A Pagan Spain’ 36). In Phillips’s estimation, English tourists, alongside the expatriate community in Spain and Gibraltar, insulate themselves against integration with the Europeans by way of an aggressive return to nationalist stereotype – that of the xenophobic football hooligan. Phillips’s interactions with these communities can be seen as both diasporic and cosmopolitan in the documenting of his travels through Europe, and his problematical positioning of himself leads to an unresolved narrative. Similarly, Evaristo’s narrative engages with what has been identified as a working towards a ‘construction of European collective memories in the plural, which strive for a growing understanding of diversity’ that is often contested and problematic (Pakier and Stråth 13). Stanley, while at first concerned by his status as a non-white traveller in Europe, slowly begins to unravel his own conflicted connections to the space of the continent. The further east he travels, the more complex his relationship to Jessie becomes, but his relationship to Europe does the opposite, becoming clearer as he works his way through countries and histories. When Stanley meets Zaryab, the ghost of an Arab living in Spain during the time of Jabal al-Tariq, the Moorish conqueror of Gibraltar, he awakens to the possibilities that the Moorish history of Spain holds for him, and ‘as he explored the past, he became aware that the past was exploring him, too’ (*Soul Tourists* 155). This textual moment evidences how the narrative intersects with Hall’s conceptualisation of a “constructed” past, in which Stanley is constructing from the presence of mythical, ghostly bodies his own European cultural affiliation. In contemplating the ‘misty peaks [of the Atlas mountains] within his imaginary grasp’, and deciding that ‘Africa would be for another time’ (153), Stanley is distanced by Evaristo from a normative narrative of diasporic return. Significantly, as he reconstitutes his cultural trajectory

in the wake of the death of the migrant generation which preceded him, he travels eastward in a move towards a multivalent European consciousness.

In contrast to Stanley's reconstituted Englishness, Jessie's narrative differs greatly – twelve years Stanley's senior, she is 'of no stock, let alone good stock' (103), a mixed-race "foundling" left to the care of Catholic nuns after her Ghanaian father returns to his own country. If Stanley feels his father has been an absent figure in his life, Jessie's experience is one not just of absence, but abandonment by men. Married multiple times, the cruel irony of her love life is that the man she cared for the most is discovered to be her biogenetic cousin, conceived illegitimately while her father's brother is studying in Leeds. Evidenced again in the narrative is the attenuated nature of diasporic filiation, as opposed to the richness of multidirectional affiliation. Jessie's narrative journey is spurred on by her desire to be forgiven by her son, Terry, who left home at sixteen following a vicious fight. Having given birth at only fifteen herself, her son would be only a few years older than Stanley, and their relationship is marked by an erotic need to mother, and to be mothered. Stanley, whose father's death has reignited the grief of his mother's passing, sees Jessie as a kind of salvation, '[a] woman who was choosing my company. The first woman since who. And. She was. Yes. She was filling me up' (48). Jessie, in her turn, refers to Stanley as her 'boy', and indulges him, cooking for and clothing him. Their symbiotic relationship functions as an expression of their need to reconnect with the absent figures in their lives. Jessie's story, more so than Stanley's, charts the troubled history of inter-race relations in Britain in the postwar period. Terry's father, also a resident of an (all-boys) children's home was the 'son of a black GI' (106), a man who presumably returned to the USA after the war, leaving his unwed white mother in a precarious social position. However, Jessie resolutely denies attempts to articulate herself according to black

Atlantic traditions of filiation, or of “black roots”. In her resistance to racial essentialism, she argues

Africa’s a continent, not a country,  
so which of its cultures, thousands of tribes  
and languages is mine, exactly?  
...  
Lord, I may have a cantankerous obeah woman  
buried not so deeply in my genetic code,  
but I’m a Yorkshire woman, and reet proud of it.

(198)

The dialogic between Jessie’s genealogical history and her self-identification with the country and county of her birth is central to her story of familial loss and black subjectivity. Despite suffering the indignities of maternal abandonment resulting in a childhood spent in a Catholic orphanage, and later, the social stigma of teen motherhood, Jessie clings to a black subjecthood that locating herself as a vivacious entertainer from the North of England allows her. James Procter’s work on the regional and class divides of black Britishness is relevant to this reading, as we see in Jessie’s fierce affiliation with Leeds evidence of a narrative articulation of black Britishness which identifies the differing territorial pressures on “blackness” which exist outside the metropole that *Dwelling Places: Postwar black British Writing* (2003) examined. Procter’s study ‘examines the limits of a dislocated diaspora poetics’ in the expression of black British writing in the late twentieth century (3). Despite the boundaries this locationally specific subjecthood appears to erect, Jessie is most willing to engage with the multifarious traveller communities that she and

Stanley come into contact with through the narrative. Jessie's ability to engage with cross-cultural narratives, as evidenced by her holding 'court' at the campsite in Turkey, 'like the Queen of Tonga' (209), speaks to the ability of Evaristo's narrative to position Europe as an alternative "dwelling place" for black Britons. Initially, Jessie engages in a social whirlwind, holding gatherings for 'sometimes as many as twenty paying homage' (212). However, abandoned at the end of her sociable summer, Jessie lists her regrets:

Daylight is handing back its hours to darkness.

Wind is resurrecting the strokes of its cruel whiplash.

The lagoon is abandoned.

The camp is dismantled.

(248)

The attenuated form of the couplets, each line ending with a full stop, represents the abbreviated connectivity of the 'transient population' of the holiday camp (212). Their ability to engage in transcultural exchange is limited to brief forays which end with the dwindling light of the post-summer months. As the camp empties of life and the global travellers return home, it is only Jessie and her friend Sunita who remain, marooned in the in-between space of the camp. In Jessie's brief sojourn at the camp, the ability to construct affiliative bonds outside the confines of the black diaspora is posited by her transcultural exchange with fellow travellers around the lagoon. But when the lagoon is abandoned and those travellers return to their everyday lives, Jessie is at a loss of how to continue along her own trajectory. The result is an increasingly fractured and attenuated poetic structure. Jessie's narrative consequently functions as

conceptually able to demarcate new modes of black subjecthood, yet this conceptual ability fails to translate into a narrative ability to encompass multiple points of orientation.

Unlike Stanley, who uses the experience of boundary crossing to occupy a liminal space which enables mobilisation and an engagement with transcultural modes of being, Jessie's narrative remains unresolved. On parting from Stanley, the reader is left unaware if she has succeeded in her attempt to reconnect with her son Terry, although it is assumed to be a failure. Returning once again to Nassy Brown's theory of the 'unmappable trajectories' of Afro-Europe, although Stanley's narrative works to map the past and in so doing establishes his own route through the historical and cultural memory of the continent, Jessie herself is incapable of such imaginative mapping, as evidenced by her time at the Turkish campsite. Within the narrative, Jessie functions as a conduit for Stanley's experience, rather than discovering her own European trajectory. Marooned in Kuwait at the end of the novel, unable to move either east or west, Jessie remains incapable of connecting with the spectral histories Stanley has unwittingly unearthed.

Like Jessie, Stanley's journey ends between east and west, although he is left with the opportunity for a continuation of his journey which Jessie is denied. Stanley 'stand[s] on the crystallized shore of the Kuwaiti desert', where

behind are the oil refineries of Iraq, the endless fields of Turkey and, further back, the vacillating topography of Europe: the A-roads, autoroutes, autostrada, the freeway that has led me here to this rasping beach, these waves littered with casually flung diamonds, this blow torch on my back, turning me a madder red and all else blazing glitter.

Stanley turns his back to Europe, resisting its 'vacillating topography' in order to gaze upon a darkened sea. Yet despite the diasporic invocation of the sea – the inviting waves which sparkle in his estimation – Stanley is cognisant that without the routes he has taken through the continent, he would not be free to contemplate further movement outwards. As he turns 'madder red' in his contemplation of the future trajectories along which he will travel, he would be unable to engage with this newly cogent multidirectional consciousness without having found his cultural place within European memory. In positioning Stanley in such a way, Evaristo's narrative leaves him in a transitional moment – not simply his own moment, having turned his back temporarily on the west, in order to gaze eastwards across the Arabian sea – but also, crucially, Evaristo leaves the narrative on the brink of a historical moment, teetering between a post-Soviet and pre-Gulf War Europe. In the critical location of the narrative in the year 1987, Stanley is able to move across a Europe still divided into east and west by the Berlin Wall, a Europe which has not yet seen the mobilisation of troops across the contested space of the Middle East. Both conceptually and politically, then, this is a European space of both open trajectories and defined boundaries. As a consequence, the narrative is able to mobilise the historical not to locate a diasporic mode of filiation, but to allow for a new articulation of selfhood which constitutes itself across boundaries of cultural affiliation and memory. With Stanley's realisation that 'the journey from England, with all its characters and happenings, had not only freed him from the bondage of his early years but also opened up the history of his country and continent to him' (239), the narrative locates a black subjectivity which is resourced by multiple trajectories and transcultural connectivities – one which is not sourced solely in the diasporic black Atlantic. In so



doing Evaristo posits an ‘experiential’ black Englishness aligned with Michael Gardiner’s interpretation of contemporary English literature.

As I have examined, *Soul Tourists* is a nuanced telling of the ability of historical resonance to build cross-cultural spaces of the European. The “silenced” black histories which Stanley unearths are not just unknown narratives – in the case of Pushkin, Gannibal, de Medici, Mary Seacole, and Lucy Negro, they are well-known and speculated upon – but in revisiting these figures, Evaristo builds a map of the European which is not based upon an erasure, but rather an acknowledgement of multiply located and multidirectional cultural histories that lay claim to black British personhood. With Jessie’s declaration that ‘the point is to be always on the move’ (52), the text aligns itself with the ‘the increased mobility of people and culture [which] generates new narrative strategies and sites for identity construction’ (Nyman 15). It is with this mobility, this movement, with which Evaristo’s text grapples. But, rather than Jopi Nyman’s articulation of this mobility as leading to a specifically diasporic ‘liminal space of identity’ which challenges fixed identifications along mono-racial or mono-cultural lines (22), *Soul Tourists* allows the reader imaginatively to travel along new trajectories of European consciousness. Stanley, vowing to ‘discover my difference and make it my own’ (123), speaks not just to the black European experience, but to multivalent European histories as a whole. With the exposure of black influence on European culture, Evaristo repositions a history in which black and white experience are not just entwined, but interdependent. This interdependency allows for a new articulation of the black European subject, one which moves forward from diasporic trajectories and towards new alignments along multiply located dimensionalities of cultural memory.

By positioning the 2009 edition of *Lara* as an index of the shifting concerns of contemporary writing by black British authors, I have shaped an understanding of

Evaristo's work as both formally and thematically inventive. Additionally, through the reading of *Lara* and *Soul Tourists* with particular attention to their English contexts, I have charted an evolution of black British writing which contends with a multidirectional axis of black subjectivity and transcultural exchange.<sup>34</sup> The multi-axial orientation of Lara, Stanley and Jessie in relation to their multiple non-diasporic trajectories establishes a narrative aesthetic influenced by the histories and alternative genealogies of black Europe. In so doing Evaristo evidences a newly emergent black English subjectivity which is in conversation with the work of Diana Evans and Caryl Phillips, and one which allows for the repositioning of black Englishness across a multidirectional and transcultural axis which is not reliant upon the black Atlantic model for its points of orientation.

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<sup>34</sup> Nicola Abram's recent work on black British drama has theorised a 'spherical autology' of black Britishness evidenced by a revised cartology in the work of Mojisolo Adebayo ('Geographical Poles' July 2014). My work builds on this image of the world spinning on its axis to locate new trajectories of travel and belonging in contemporary black British fiction.

## Conclusion

### Emerging paradigms in contemporary black British writing

‘The globalized nature of the contemporary world does not allow the luxury of ignoring the difficult questions multiculturalism raises . . . One important issue concerns the distinction between multiculturalism and what may be called “plural monoculturalism”. Does the existence of a diversity of cultures, which might pass each other like ships in the night, count as a successful case of multiculturalism?’

(Sen 149-157)

My thesis engages with literary representations of the limitations of multiculturalism – so clearly brought into focus by Sen’s terminological reference to ‘plural monoculturalism’ above – in its investigation of the circumscribed and constrained spheres through which the fictional black British subjects move. Writing in 2006, Amartya Sen aptly questions the utopian vision of contemporary multicultural societies, laying bare the “illusion” of inclusive diversity espoused by the political classes. He argues convincingly that multiculturalism, as it has been allowed to develop in the west, has led to an inculcation rather than an elision of difference. Communities have become more, not less, divided, as traditions ‘[co-exist] side by side’ (Sen 158), leading to an increase of divisiveness between disparate groups. The inability of multicultural communities to embrace difference and communicate transculturally across boundaries of difference is a theme explored in all the novels presented in this study. If communities exist only within their own cells or spheres, then there is no space for encounter or communication across cultural lines. In order to move forward from this vexed and insular contemporary multiculturalism, I

identify an alternative 'plurality [of] affiliation' in the novels studied here (Sen xvii). These alternative affiliations are by turns geographic, non-familial, and transcultural, and lead to an incomplete yet convincing turn to the cosmopolitan in the work of the writers presented.

My thesis has explored the contemporary writing of Caryl Phillips, Zadie Smith, Diana Evans, and Bernardine Evaristo. The selection of novels was chosen in order to highlight the ways in which the narratives are moving forward from an Atlanticist model of black British writing. In placing the texts alongside one another in this way, my reading identifies an emergent, non-normative black British aesthetic. In Chapter One I framed my reading of Caryl Phillips's recent novels *A Distant Shore* and *In the Falling Snow* with Michael Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory. Using Rothberg in this way allowed me to demonstrate what I identify as the tendency in both novels for Phillips to hypothesise a black British subjecthood which encounters and draws from multiple transcultural referents. My reading of *A Distant Shore* explored the ways in which the narrative preoccupation with naming, silence, and domesticity problematises accepted models of community aesthetics. The England of *A Distant Shore* is a space where hospitality and hostility go hand-in-hand, and where exceptional states of belonging are portrayed as the normative mode of social interaction. I then turned to Phillips's 2009 novel *In the Falling Snow*, which I argue indexes the vexed contemporary relationship with multiculturalism, while simultaneously foregrounding the deeply rooted interconnectivity between England and its migrant communities. In both novels, it is the capacity for individual acts of transcultural communication which allow for an alternative community-building to take place. I identify the capacity of the narratives to engage in what I term a nascent and incomplete *multidirectional consciousness*. Nonetheless, the success of these acts are limited, and their limitations are indicative of the incapacity of the current

diasporic, multicultural model of cultural belonging to adequately account for the dialogues of contemporary communities.

My reading of Zadie Smith's "Willesden" novels, *White Teeth* and *NW*, in Chapter Two, explored the capacity of the texts to locate a localised, particular cosmopolitanism that problematises elite notions of the cosmopolitan. However, this localised cosmopolitanism is not without its constraints, as the characters find when they attempt to transcend the proscribed "cells" of multicultural city life. I contend that, rather than valorising the multicultural city, Smith's work warns of the risks of approaching representation from a diasporic perspective. I argue that her debut novel *White Teeth* does not celebrate millennial multiculturalism, as has been previously accepted by the critical community, but rather exposes the constraints of an insular and exclusionary multiculturalism at the turn of the last century. I posit that the narrative instead aspires to the partial allegiances of multiracial subjects – Smith's community of misfits, the Chalfens, Iqbals, and Jones's, are not unified – but do they need to be? Similarly, with *NW*, Smith emphasises the economics of exclusion in her tale of post-crash London. As Felix traverses the multiple locales of the novel, the cosmopolitan city space that Smith renders is exposed as restrictive and fraught with danger. This danger is exemplified by Felix's fate at the hands of Nathan and his unnamed accomplice. Nevertheless, Natalie and Leah's attempts to live without the restrictions of societal expectation – Natalie through her deviant sexual exploits, and Leah through her rejection of motherhood – allows for a rendering of the cosmopolitan which rejects restraint, however briefly and unsuccessfully. I argue that the limited successes of the two narratives rendering of the cosmopolitan posit an alternative process of community building which moves forward from the vexed, cellular nature of contemporary multiculturalism.

As my thesis turned to the novels of Diana Evans in Chapter Three, I evidenced the movement away from a generational model of black British literature through my readings of *26a* and *The Wonder*. I argued that *26a* posits a plural cosmopolitan mobility which acknowledges both local and transcultural sites of exchange, and in so doing redefines attachments to space and place. With the “home” of *26a* presented as a hostile and even deadly space, the characters instead forge multiply located sites of attachment. These sites are not strictly genealogical but instead traverse multiple cultural and historical locales. However, these transcultural, poly-racial, and cosmopolitan renderings of subjecthood are limited and circumscribed by the failure of certain characters (Georgia in *26a* and Antoney in *The Wonder*) to embrace cosmopolitan modes of being in the world. The movement across boundaries in which the characters of both novels engage are both physical and cultural, but, crucially, they are *not* strictly diasporic. Bessi and Kemy of *26a*, sisters of Nigerian-British heritage, both travel to the Caribbean rather than to their “ancestral” homeland, and do so not to engage in home or heritage-building, but as tourists. Similarly, Antoney and Carla travel not to the Caribbean but to Europe with the Midnight Ballet, and they do so as actors in a transcultural yet also elite and Euro-centric artistic endeavour. Antoney’s Midnight Ballet dance troupe offers an alternative black British genealogy, one which ultimately offers Lucas a conduit through which to embark on his own transcultural future which ruptures his presupposed genealogical ties to London. These movements emphasise transcultural, rather than discretely generational, affiliations. In so doing Evans’s narratives emphasise a multi-locational positionality for the black British subject, one which acknowledges and celebrates contemporary cosmopolitan social structures.

Finally, in Chapter Four I turned to the work of Bernardine Evaristo. Following on from my brief engagement with her the 2009 revised edition of her debut

novel-in-verse, *Lara*, in my introduction, I framed my reading of the novel through an acknowledgement of the shifting concerns of the 2009 edition as opposed to the 1997 debut. Framing the novel in this way expresses the central concerns of my thesis – namely, that the concerns of contemporary black British writing have moved forward in the first decade of the twenty-first century, as the texts move beyond a strictly generational, Atlanticist articulation of black British subjecthood. Evaristo's narrative exploration of the European heritage of her eponymous protagonist indexes the turn towards Europe, and away from the Gilroyan Atlantic triangle, that I have identified in my readings of all four authors included in this study. I argue that the 2009 edition of *Lara* posits a *multi-axial Englishness* that pursues points of orientation that situates black experience *within* English cultural belonging, and is not limited to Afro-centric or British cultural and historical markers in its location of historical memory in Europe and Ireland. Likewise, Evaristo's 2005 novel *Soul Tourists* rejects the generational model of black British subjectivity, looking instead to transcultural European referents in order to chart a new trajectory of black British subjectivity. In so doing, both novels revitalise conceptions of black Englishness in relation to Europe and European modes of belonging. As such the narratives exemplify the failure of black Atlanticist models to adequately account for the histories and contemporary subjectivities of multi-locational black English subjects.

There are multiple fruitful connections that can be made across my readings of contemporary black British writing. The preoccupation of Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* and *In the Falling Snow* with the failure of multicultural communities to build inclusive sites of transcultural communication is also indexed in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and *NW*. Both Phillips and Smith articulate a need for transcultural communication to occur on an individual level between members of disparate community groups. These partial connections across sites of belonging are

crucial to the establishment of a cosmopolitan, multidirectional mode of Englishness. However, in neither Phillips nor Smith's work are these partial allegiances allowed space to forge a new kind of cosmopolitan community.

The limited ability of cosmopolitanism to offer a viable alternative to cellular iterations of multiculturalism is a theme continued in Diana Evans's novels. There, the inability of Georgia and Antoney to engage with cosmopolitan modes of being in the world cause the proto-cosmopolitanism of Bessi and the *Midnight Ballet* to falter. In addition, the hostility Georgia encounters in sites of home – both Waifer Avenue and Sekon – draw a parallel to the hostility that Gabriel/Solomon contends with in his search for refuge in *A Distant Shore*. Both novels problematise the inclusivity and mobility of contemporary multicultural communities and offer limited cosmopolitan visions with which to counter this hostility. However, the narrative circumspection of the potential of cosmopolitanism to build poly-racial, transcultural sites of belonging leads to a hesitant and circumscribed articulation of the cosmopolitan, and one which relies on elite modes of subjectivity.

Nevertheless, these limited articulations of cosmopolitanism still express a hopeful and dynamic alternative to the vexed cellularity of multiculturalism. The narratives contain a nascent cosmopolitanism which offers a new articulation of self, in a way that multiculturalism and globalisation had not previously permitted black English subjects. The concern of Phillips, Smith, Evans, and Evaristo with looking not only across the black Atlantic, but also with identifying European points of orientation, admits the formation of a world narrative in which memory and culture is communicated across racial and national boundaries in a multidirectional confluence of voices and experience. In addition, the emphasis across all the novels included in this study on the specific, localised sphere of England posits a black British aesthetic which is beginning to acknowledge particularly English modes of belonging and



selfhood. The authors are emphasising the cultural particularity of England – their characters are not just black British, but black *English*, as Jessie so stridently admonishes Stanley in *Soul Tourists*. This focus on Englishness simultaneously recasts England as a site of selfhood for the black subject, whilst also problematising the construction of a “black British canon”.

In order to suggest a viable alternative to the generational, Atlanticist model of black British aesthetics, the novels of Phillips, Evans, and Evaristo – and in particular *In the Falling Snow*, *The Wonder*, *Lara*, and *Soul Tourists* – all engage with the European as a newly emergent transcultural referent for the black British subject. As a result of this engagement, they posit a non-normative black British aesthetics which draw upon multidirectional trajectories of subjectivity and suggest a break with the generational model of black British writing. Locating this non-normative aesthetic in relation to iterations of Englishness allow my readings of the novels to uncover a newly emergent black British aesthetic that engages with transcultural and non-diasporic modes of cosmopolitan belonging. The positioning of Europe as an *alternative dwelling place* for the black Briton hypothesises the transformative and as yet under-discussed potential of black British writing to transcend cultural particularity and in so doing, traverse multi-axial trajectories of cultural and historical affiliation.

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