Cosmopolitanism and Contemporary black British Writing

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Abstract

This thesis critically explores the conjunction of cosmopolitanism and contemporary black British writing, a hitherto little acknowledged field of investigation. I argue that a problematic lacuna exists within black British literary scholarship, which renders theoretical and textual engagements with cosmopolitanism as incommensurable with the "authentically" located political and discursive formation of black Britain. This thesis proposes that an examination of cosmopolitanism within the study of black British writing remains both vital and crucially generative for the field. I formulate cosmopolitanism as a critical praxis and expression of a certain aesthetic modality that captures the provocative ways in which twenty-first-century black British authors have uncovered translocal, outer-national and cross-cultural histories of alliance in their work. The writers examined in this thesis – whose work ranges across established and innovative cultural forms – resource the past as a means to compose their particular literary enunciations of cosmopolitanism. Each writer imagines a specific "sign of history" (in Jean-François Lyotard's usage) that reconstitutes the recent past in the service of excavating distinctive cosmopolitan histories, affinities and opportunities. The chapters in this thesis, which are organized around three pivotal historical signs (1948; 1981/1982; 1989), closely examine the work of James Berry, Andrea Levy, Alex Wheatle, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Zadie Smith, Mike Phillips and Bernardine Evaristo. By delineating how these writers envision historically inspired worldly imaginaries (whether in pejorative or salutary ways), I offer a critical revaluation of black British writing, one that enables new interpretative avenues from which to appraise *and* critique the field's burgeoning cosmopolitanism.

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Introduction
New Unities, New Alliances

Within the landscape of black British literary criticism, cosmopolitanism has become, to some extent, a little-discussed idea. Seldom examined in the field's few dedicated monographs (Procter 2003; Stein 2004; Dawson 2007; Ellis 2007; Gunning 2010; Pirker 2011) and rarely taken up as a central topic of concern within the growing number of essays, anthologies and collections, cosmopolitanism – as a potentially productive critical concept – has emerged as an abstract and misunderstood moniker often deployed as something to oppose. Tacit in the field's engagement with the term is the assumption that cosmopolitanism has no intellectual or creative referent within the "authentically" located nature of black British writing; it is a concept that is both foreign and estranged, elitist and apolitical, particularly in relation to the creative output of contemporary black British writers. James Procter's important study *Dwelling Places* pithily epitomizes, and has indeed set the path for, the ways in which criticism of black British texts has come to not only evade but also deride the use of term. Procter remains keen to revalue the function of place within postwar black British cultural production, and his attempt to trace a black British politics of location is positioned in direct opposition to what he terms the dominating discourses of "placelessness" within "post-national, post-colonial diasporic vocabularies and frameworks" (4). Within his analysis, cosmopolitanism turns into a slippery concept which becomes conflated with the "non-place-based solidarit[ies]" of diaspora studies (14). The term comes to stand as an appellation for

dislocated, privileged, metropolitan narratives – "sophisticated journeys" – that remain blind to the more grounded, material concerns of Procter's project (187).

Dwelling Places makes sure to counter explicitly its intellectual enterprise against specific "cosmopolitan (and canonical) male" writers, namely Caryl Phillips, V.S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie, who each figure travel and travelling in distinctly "cosmopolitan" ways (185). Procter's description of these writers' work, via Timothy Brennan, reveals what is centrally at stake in the evocation of the term cosmopolitanism within the category of black British writing:

> Now based in either London, New York or both, these three very different writers all deal with a knowing, sophisticated, independent mode of travel that has appealed to an equally knowing, educated, middle-class audience. (185)

The kind of cosmopolitanism propounded here locates Phillips, Naipaul and Rushdie within the interchangeable "non-places" – to amend a term from Marc Augé – of London and New York. Both of these metropolitan centres become dis-placed by Procter who figures them as metonymic spaces of dislocation, where solitary, globe-trotting travellers (and writers) gravitate; London and New York are not figured as cities in and of themselves but, to reference Augé again, "imaginary places: banal utopias, clichés" (77). The connotative aura of cosmopolitanism, which often evokes the image of a privileged "citizen of the world" or an *"aficionado"* of different cultures, enables Procter to interpolate these writers as pejoratively cosmopolitan (Hannerz 239). The adjectival baggage of cosmopolitanism is resourced to enunciate the detached, masculine and distinctly hegemonic sensibilities of these writers, and

by implication, their readers. Their work and global success as "black" writers in particular represents less a *mondalisation*, a "planetary awareness or consciousness" on their behalf, than an ephemeral, rootless and essentially elitist position (Augé x).

I am not concerned here with defending the work of Phillips, Naipaul, or Rushdie (although there is much to be said about the generalized grouping of these three writers). Rather, I want to register and examine Procter's curious aversion towards cosmopolitanism. Postwar black British writing, to Procter, is a fundamentally located and politicized form of cultural production. When a black British writer is seen to overstep the boundaries of the local, regional or national – whether through their narrative concerns, literary style, themes or book sales – it appears that they begin to crucially eclipse the category of black British. It becomes rather incongruent to read Caryl Phillips, for example, against the more "located" work of Jackie Kay or Tariq Latif. Phillips, Naipaul and Rushdie represent in *Dwelling Places* a body of work that remains antithetical, intrinsically mismatched, to the civic concerns of the monograph. Procter is more occupied with the "'vulgar', working-class, or popular" narratives of travel that the cosmopolitan (male) writers appear to exclude (185). While I do not disagree with Procter's vital emphasis on the political and aesthetic import of "provincial" narratives, locations and sensibilities within the field of black British studies, I do want to draw attention to what I see as its capturing of two developing trajectories within black British literary studies – one that attends to an important politics of identity, history, race and belonging within the hard-won politicized spaces in Britain, and another that breaks beyond these geographies to luxuriate in the worldly non-places of a post-racial, apolitical, outer-national cosmopolitanism (3). My problem with *Dwelling Places* is that through its concise and powerfully polemic argument it has succeeded in focusing rather

narrowly the critical lens through which we read black British literature, a category of writing that is conceptualized almost exclusively in and of an increasingly devolving nation. Texts that interrogate or move beyond the located boundaries of their black Britishness betray, to some degree, the political ground of their formation.

This thesis commences from the intersection of these two methods of reading black British writing in order to address a problematic lacuna within the field's literary criticism that fences off and discounts creative and critical engagements with cosmopolitanism. I write against the assumption that cosmopolitanism remains somehow an incommensurable, or non-intrinsic, concept from which to engage with the political realities and historical exigencies of black British texts. I am interested in the messy entanglements between so-called worldly and localized imaginative narratives that collectively bear witness to the untidy geopoetic junctures characteristic of contemporary black British literature. I argue that a critically attentive consideration of cosmopolitanism offers a pertinent means to explore the novel ways in which black British writing has self-reflexively figured new unities and cross-cultural alliances through both local and worldly locations. I examine a diverse range of twenty-first-century black British texts – from the "high-brow" to the "popular," the poetic to the narrative, the realist to the experimental – in order to mark what I see as a distinctly cosmopolitan re-examination of black Britishness in recent years. By reading closely the work of James Berry, Andrea Levy, Alex Wheatle, Zadie Smith, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mike Phillips and Bernardine Evaristo, I suggest that not only does cosmopolitanism, as a critical praxis and expression of a certain aesthetic modality, have a great deal to offer in the way of reading these writers' work, but also (and more importantly), that black British

writing has much to offer current discourses of cosmopolitanism. It is the wager of this thesis that a generative, timely and fresh engagement between cosmopolitanism and black British writing is possible. Rather than pursuing a comparative exercise in which I assess the virtues of reading cosmopolitanism as a framework or ideology for black British writing, I begin from the recognition that the concept of cosmopolitanism has been intimately entangled within the cultural production and discursive formation of black Britain.

To do this, I want to first interrogate three instances where cosmopolitanism has been referenced or taken up within the critical literature surrounding black British studies in general. An examination of two edited collections, which were both published in the early 2000s, alongside a closer revisiting of *Dwelling Places*, enables us to gauge how the field has positioned itself (particularly in the twenty-first century) in relation, or in contradistinction, to concepts of cosmopolitanism. While I am especially concerned with literary criticism, my thesis remains necessarily transdisciplinary in its engagement with the intersecting disciplines of cultural studies and more widely the social sciences. While cosmopolitanism has been a term of recent interest in cultural studies, particularly through the foundational work of Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy, its relative neglect in the field of literary criticism provokes opportunities from which to discern and recover its discursive and analytical potential.

The 2002 *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, edited by Alison Donnell, offers a productive starting point. The *Companion* is marketed on its back cover as "the first comprehensive reference book to provide multidisciplinary coverage of the field of black cultural production in Britain." It is "[a] work of meticulous scholarship," David Dabydeen, the Guyanese-born black British writer

and critic asserts on its back cover, "which will become the standard text on the subject." The term "black" is used in a wide sense to include African, Caribbean and South Asian cultural production, and the contemporary is mobilized to position an explicitly post-1970s dispensation that has at its roots a politicized formation of black Britishness. Beginning the *Companion* in the 1970s enables Donnell to situate blackness historically as a political signifier that developed at a moment when difference in Britain was galvanized through an explicit politics of resistance. As she makes clear in her introduction, "black" indexes "collectivity and alliance under a political identity" which "encompasses people of African, Caribbean and South Asian decent" (xii). Alongside the political construction of black in Britain, Donnell importantly uses the 1970s to register a "generational and cultural" shift that would come to define the contemporary parameters of a distinct black British identity (xiii). It is worth quoting this shift at length:

> Many of those who had been influential in setting the early agendas around black politics and consciousness in Britain, such as Kamau Brathwaite and other members of the Caribbean Artists Movement, had provided a valuable link between black communities and activities in the USA, the Caribbean and Britain, but many of their works and their inspirations had a focus beyond Britain, which was re-interpreted by the second generation in more urgently localised tones. (xiii)

Donnell identifies here a critical juncture in the 1970s that marks both a deviation from and transformation of the political import of blackness in Britain. The so-called first generation of African, Caribbean and South Asian migrants invigorated a politically self-conscious conception of blackness that brought together tripartite

alliances and connections outside of Britain. Spurred by anti-imperial, anti-racist movements and inspired in many ways by the Civil Rights movement in the United States, these migrants created a formation of black Britishness that was located, according to Donnell, "beyond Britain," while the second generation (the children of the migrants) refigured these rebellious energies "in more urgently localised tones." While Donnell captures a crucial translocation of concerns in the 1970s (one that traces the contours of a specific literary culture as well), I want to suggest that in doing so she concomitantly reiterates the dominant ways in which black British writing has been read in the contemporary period. Anticipating Procter, Donnell situates contemporary black British culture as one that is primarily organized along "localised" lines. Donnell limits the scope of her *Companion* by implicitly relegating perspectives that look "beyond Britain" primarily to the first generation. In her description of this key cultural shift, the second and subsequent generations (who are the focus the companion) are figured as scaling back the outer- and transnational alliances of the first.[1]

Given this particular frame, it is not surprising that there should be no entry on cosmopolitanism within the *Companion*. For a substantial and spearheading collection that features the work of "distinguished practitioners, key intellectuals, seminar organizations and concepts" it is telling that cosmopolitanism should be absent (backcover). Donnell judiciously reminds us that the *Companion* does not reflect a definitive statement on the field; indeed, she positions the collection as a

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[1] Donnell reiterates this claim in her article "Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing," which was published the same year as the *Companion*. Documenting the first generation of "black intellectuals and writers in Britain," Donnell argues that they "were perhaps not interested in establishing new national identities … this was a time when international, transnational, and cosmopolitan identifications seemed both more exciting and useful" (12). Unlike the introduction to the companion however, she suggests that there remains two "periods of critical history" which have emphasized "transnational, international, and cosmopolitan identifications": the first is the decolonization moment, of which the first generation were a part, and the second is the late 1980s postcolonial and black Atlantic studies moment, which offered "theoretical interpellations towards mobile cultural identifications" (14).

"starting-point and a place of signposts that others may follow and elaborate on" (xvi). Yet, given its standing as the "first comprehensive reference book" to canvas the "field of black cultural production in Britain," it does provide a compelling temperature of the state of the discipline. Significantly, while cosmopolitanism does not feature in the collection, "cosmopolitan celebrity" does. This specific entry incisively exposes the problematic ways in which contemporary black British studies in general and black British literary criticism in particular engages with concepts of cosmopolitanism. As the only reference – or "signpost" – in the collection to some form of cosmopolitanism, it remains indicative of how the field has been mapped in relation to the term. In reading this entry, I hope not only to demonstrate the field's anxious relationship with cosmopolitanism, but also the implications of a contribution such as this on the way in which black British literary criticism represents itself.

The entry on "cosmopolitan celebrity" delineates a condensed and notably subdued definition of Timothy Brennan's invention of the term. As the entry outlines, "cosmopolitan celebrity" "describe[s] a particular brand of postcolonial and black literary production that was rapidly assuming a 'celebrity' status among an informed Western readership during [the late-1980s]" (84). Quoting from Brennan, the entry goes on to explain that a "cosmopolitan celebrity":

> diagnoses a dispersed, diasporic, South Asian community of intellectuals living predominantly in the US and Britain who share a preoccupation with 'a *world* literature whose traditional national boundaries are (for them) meaningless', which privileges 'international' debates over 'internal' ones. They are, in short, 'not so much an elite *at home,* as spokespersons for a kind of perennial immigration'. (84)

Salman Rushdie represents the "epitome" of a "cosmopolitan celebrity" (according to Brennan), and for the entry (penned by Procter) it can "easily be extended to include the work of a number of other black British writers, including Hanif Kureishi, V.S. Naipaul and Caryl Phillips (84). From this description, a "cosmopolitan celebrity" refers to "black" or "postcolonial" writers who fashion themselves as advocates for the valuing of diasporic lives and movements. What distinguishes the work of these writers/intellectuals is that their creative output reflects a distinct indifference for "traditional" national boundaries and explicitly seeks to move beyond the confines of national borders and imaginaries.

While the "cosmopolitan celebrity" is explicated as a subtly problematic position (where the above-mentioned writers become delicately aligned with attributions of privilege, elitism and a dislocated politics), the term's critical impact becomes effectively neutralized in this entry particularly when compared to Brennan's much more searing articulation. Writing in *Race & Class* in 1989, Brennan coins the term "cosmopolitan celebrity" as a means to scrutinize a certain trend within the work of "Third World" writers and intellectuals such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Bharati Mukherjee, Derek Walcott, Isabel Allende, and Salman Rushdie. For Brennan, these cosmopolitan writers are in conflict with anti-colonial traditions that resource the nation for its radical politics. Such global "celebrities" "enter the public sphere as a distinct community without a name" by universalizing a "Third World" exotic aesthetics made ready for consumption in the Western world (7). Not only do these writers "share a harsh questioning of radical decolonisation theory [and] … a dismissive or parodic attitude towards the project of national culture," they fundamentally "violat[e] an important Third World rhetorical mode"

that evacuates the transgressive scope of their work (7; 10). The cosmopolitanism of these writers is articulated by Brennan as a dubious style of cultural production that marks the politically corrosive processes of selling out. By dulling Brennan's critique behind his conception of a "cosmopolitan celebrity," Procter figures the term in more palatable ways for the study of black British culture. The radical critique behind Brennan's term becomes screened as a means to fluently enter it into the discourse of contemporary black British studies. Since this is the only entry that engages with cosmopolitanism, the *Companion* ends up positioning the term in relation to contemporary black British culture as a pejorative referent that marks, at best, a glamorous writerly sensibility that remains preoccupied with exclusively outer-national concerns. In effect, the *Companion* remains unable to offer any productive sense of cosmopolitanism which might enable a critical engagement between black British literature and cosmopolitan criticism and theory.

In contradistinction, Kwesi Owusu's edited collection *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader* (2000) attempts to suggest a new and more constructive way of resourcing cosmopolitanism for the study of black British cultures. As a volume that traces histories of the postwar African and Caribbean diaspora within Britain, it features key writings and texts that have shaped the critical and creative construction of "black British society." Owusu's collection positions itself as an introduction to the "emergent and increasingly popular field" of black British cultural studies – an intellectual concern that necessarily follows the impact the field has had on other disciplines such as "sociology, literature and political science" (1). While the volume remains somewhat unbalanced in its conception – Owusu claims for instance, without much evidence, that the 1990s signalled a scaling down of black political and creative aspirations – it nonetheless recommends a possible, if not

underdeveloped, notion of a critically cosmopolitan sensibility within contemporary black British culture. By juxtaposing Stuart Hall's essay "Frontlines and Backyards: The Terms of Change" (1997) alongside Ambalavaner Sivanandan's interview in the collection on radical black political culture, Owusu charts a crucial split in black British cultural studies through which he envisions a "new and vibrant cosmopolitanism" (13). For Hall, the 1990s registered not only the fractures within Afro-Asian communities, which had politically banded together as "black" since the 1960s and 1970s, but also African and Caribbean communities. These fissures suggest to Hall a need to re-examine the "frontlines" of a so-called cohesive construction of black British society. Sivanandan, however, maintains a more idealist position in his contention that we must maintain these historical unities, even as they fracture, as a means to sustain the radical impetus of blackness in Britain. This split in identifications marks for Owusu a call for "new stories to be told" which self-reflexively account for the entangled allegiances of blackness in Britain (13). Concluding his introduction to the collection, Owusu leaves us with the hope for a "vibrant cosmopolitanism" that might be galvanized in the future by stories and narratives yet to come (13).

While Owusu cites cosmopolitanism in a rudimentary and seemingly perfunctory fashion, he nonetheless offers a provocative invitation from which to reconceptualize black British studies through the purview of a cosmopolitan perspective. By situating this perspective between two opposing positions, one which looks back in order to invigorate Afro-Asian unities and alliances (Sivanandan) and another which looks forward to the consequences of the splinters within these alliances (Hall), he implicitly sets up an important dialectic which frames what we might want to call a distinctly black British cosmopolitanism. The

generalizing move made in Owusu's conclusion which claims that "we have come full circle," can be generously read as a means to open up an intersection of debates, situated between and around Sivanandan and Hall, that call for a historically minded and holistic reimagining of the black in Britain (13). To my mind, Owusu's ostensibly glib reference to cosmopolitanism provides an opportunity from which to discern the connotative argument tacit within the collection. The latent cosmopolitan perspective in Owusu's introduction provides one of the few generative conceptions of the term within contemporary volumes on black British studies.

In what may seem a contradictory move, I want to return to James Procter's *Dwelling Places* in order to identify an example of what I see as another productive conception of cosmopolitanism. As previously mentioned, much of the intellectual drive of *Dwelling Places* works against the "placelessness" and dislocated tendencies of diasporic and cosmopolitan discourses. Given Procter's scepticism, even disdain, for cosmopolitanism, it is thus telling that he should attempt to recover the concept, if only in a small segment of his book. In his chapter on suburban places, Procter examines the intricate canvases of the Liverpool-based artists Amrit and Rabindra Singh. In order to read critically the eclectic "suburban scenes" on the canvases, Procter suggests that the images "offer a version of hybridity that is neither straightforwardly celebratory *nor* cosmopolitan" (130). He positions these images as representative of a specific "'provincial' Asian culture, distinct from the sophisticated cosmopolitanism of the city" (130). Yet, via Kobena Mercer, Procter suggests that these canvases, which depict the ordinary "day-to-day lives in and around the family home," elicit a *discrepant* cosmopolitanism "which celebrates the provincial as much as the transnational; the local as much as the diasporic; working- or lower-middle-class culture rather than elite, 'highbrow' culture" (133). Here, the

cosmopolitanism of these canvases is evoked through stylized representations of everyday suburban scenes which mark the entanglement of provincial and transnational locations, and local and diasporic identifications.

Procter delineates a conception of cosmopolitanism that reflects an *aesthetic* perspective not dissimilar to Homi Bhabha's vernacular cosmopolitanism (1996; 2000; 2004), Paul Gilroy's vulgar or demotic cosmopolitanism (2004), or, most obviously, James Clifford's model of discrepant cosmopolitanism (1990). This body of critical literature remains curiously absent from Procter's discussion however, particularly the work of Bhabha and Clifford whose relevant texts were published before *Dwelling Places*. Indeed, these rich intellectual resources seem almost actively occluded from Procter's use of the term. In borrowing a discrepant notion of cosmopolitanism, Procter turns to Kobena Mercer who autobiographically deploys the term in *Welcome to the Jungle* (1994). Mercer (who references Clifford) uses discrepant cosmopolitanism as a means to diagnose a personal sense of postcolonial hybridity and everyday multiculturalism, which he finds in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and a Bally Sagoo remix of Nusret Fateh Ali Khan's music (29). Procter borrows Mercer's emphasis on popular culture, the ordinary and the provincial in his own engagement with discrepant cosmopolitanism, but he does so in a way that erases and cuts out Clifford's foundational contribution to the discussion. I am not attempting to demonstrate a pedantic and overly critical reading of Procter's work; rather, I want to register his reluctance to account fully for and validate the intellectual inheritances of cosmopolitanism that can be productively deployed within black British studies. Procter's emphasis on a specifically *discrepant* cosmopolitanism can be read as yet another instance in which he subtly articulates the incommensurability of cosmopolitan ideas to the study of more

"authentic" and located black British texts. It is not surprising, then, that this constructive sense of cosmopolitanism should be missing from Procter's contribution to Donnell's *Companion*.

It would be easy to develop a pessimistic view of the validity of conjoining the terms black British with cosmopolitanism, particularly when we consider these three seemingly minor occasions through which black British studies, in general, has contended with notions of the cosmopolitan. In order to develop a sense of how cosmopolitanism has been mapped in the field, particular in literary studies, I have brought together a critical overview which references a single entry in a 356 page companion (Donnell), two paragraphs in an introduction to a sizeable volume (Owusu), and a brief, yet significant, moment in one monograph's chapter (Procter). However embedded and obscure these references may seem, it is my contention that they indicate both a crucial neglect of cosmopolitanism within contemporary black British studies and a productive starting point for me to begin to build a more productive and progressive envisioning of cosmopolitan criticism. Donnell's *Companion*, for instance, circulates the "cosmopolitan celebrity" as an indexed term for the study of black British culture. Via Timothy Brennan, the *Companion* posits an understanding of cosmopolitanism that remains attentive, even suspicious, towards "successful" narratives of dislocation and travel that privilege outer-national concerns at the expense of the domestic. Owusu's volume suggests a deferred cosmopolitanism, yet-to-come, that remains constructive in its dialectic engagement with past, present and future black British cultures. Positioning itself through debates between Sivanandan and Hall, Owusu offers the possibility of a new cosmopolitan perspective within black British cultural studies that looks forward to multifarious alliances and narratives. And lastly, Procter's notion of a discrepant

cosmopolitanism proffers an aesthetic and literary perspective which remains grounded in representations of everyday, vernacular scenarios. His cosmopolitanism, while not explicitly delineated, draws from the work of James Clifford, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer, thinkers who each champion overtly demotic forms of cosmopolitanism.

The chapters that follow critically engage across something like these various modes of cosmopolitan criticism: the suspicious, deferred and vernacular or everyday. My critical approach brings together the intellectual allegiances implicated within – what I formulate as – the unacknowledged intersecting fields of cosmopolitan and black British studies. I amend the term "cosmopolitan criticism" from Robert Spencer's usage of it as a "literary critical approach" that traces "the latency and desirability of cosmopolitan alternatives" within postcolonial literature (7). Applied to contemporary black British writing, I understand cosmopolitan criticism more broadly as *any* critical approach that attempts to identify and recover, whether in pejorative or salutary ways, particular cosmopolitan sensibilities, susceptibilities and histories as a means to productively recalibrate existing critical debates.

For John McLeod, this attempt to recover cosmopolitanism for black British studies remains a somewhat inconsistent endeavour. In two influential essays published in *Wasafiri* – "Some Problems with 'British' in a 'Black British Canon'" (2002) and "Extra Dimensions, New Routines" (2010) – McLeod argues that there is "something new and specific about black writing of Britain in the twenty-first century," a newness that "open[s] up a range of vistas which are quite some distance removed from the purview of 'Black British Writing' as it has been predominantly understood" ("Extra Dimensions" 46). To register this twenty-first century shift,

McLeod suggests that "Black British writing" has lost it terminological efficacy in delineating the aesthetic and political concerns of contemporary black British writers. He instead offers the term "contemporary black writing of Britain" as a means to account for "a distinction between an older, dominant sphere of literary endeavour and an emergent one that is indebted to, but not overdetermined by, previous contexts and achievements" (46). In reconfiguring the black away from Britain, McLeod attempts rhetorically to mark the divergent ways in which contemporary black British writers have been moving beyond the so-called "parochial parameters of black Britain" (49). This subtle yet significant nomenclatural change exposes more of McLeod's exacting conception of "black Britain" rather than an urgent need to recodify the field. "Black Britain," for McLeod, is "best approached … as an historical signifier which points specifically to a particular period in the history of anti-racism" ("Black Britain" 70). Here, the conjunction of black Britain registers and challenges "the problematic severance of black peoples from the nation" (70). Unlike Mark Stein who understands black Britain (in terms of a literary culture), as a reference to "cross-cultural and transnational cultural contexts," McLeod envisions it as a referent for "the exclusionary inflections of the categories of race and nation" (17; "Black Britain" 70). Because of this, any attempt to recover the cosmopolitan histories and sensibilities within the category of *black British* writing remains a necessarily contradictory venture.

McLeod, like Donnell, remains unable to resource critical perspectives of contemporary black Britain that are capable of moving "beyond Britain." While McLeod insightfully articulates the unique "transnational fertility" within contemporary black British writing (a contention I uphold throughout this thesis), he

nonetheless does away with the productive tensions within the term black British, effectively evacuating its inherent transnational sensibilities and cosmopolitan possibilities ("Some Problems" 56). McLeod's recourse to a new term identifies the enduring ways in which cosmopolitanism has been effectively blocked off within black British studies. He pinpoints the current limitations of black British literary criticism in particular which does not seem adept in productively engaging with the transnational or polycultural conceptions of the nation put forth by contemporary black British writers. This thesis consciously retains the term black British in order to not only argue for its continued relevance but to also account for what I see as its discursive cosmopolitan formation.[2] In pitting together cosmopolitanism alongside black British, I seek to legitimize a cosmopolitan criticism of contemporary black British literature that critically registers its local and worldly affiliations in ways that are no longer discrepant to the field.

Embedded in my argument is the charge that any attempt to recover cosmopolitanism for the study of contemporary black British writing needs to be grounded in the political, social and historical evolution of black Britain. In other words, we need to turn towards, instead of away from, the term black British in order to appreciate its complex and unexhausted inflections. As Kobena Mercer has importantly reminded us, what makes the "political translation of *black*" "unique to British conditions," is that it "connote[s] coalition-building identifications in which the racializing code of 'color' is put *under erasure*, cancelled out but still legible in the deconstructive logic of the counterdiscourse that displaces it" (28). Here, the political and critical efficacy of black British is drawn from a position that works

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[2] I maintain Gilane Tawadros' "general editorial position" of using the term "black" with a lower case *b* as a tactic from which to account for the malleable subject positions that such a term encompasses (13).

against the pathological boundaries of race and nation. The flexibility around the signifier "black," which has been historically applied to African, Caribbean and Asian communities in Britain, articulates the open, strategic and potentially adjustable ways in which new "coalition-building" identities and identifications can develop. In what follows, I identify the cosmopolitan dynamics of this flexibility in order to delineate how this thesis "translates" the term black British for the twenty-first century. I seek ultimately to trace the shifting identifications, unities and alliances characteristic of contemporary black British writing by resourcing the enduring and fertile productivity of the term black British itself. In order to demonstrate this, I revisit A. Sivanandan's classic collection of essays in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (1982) as a means to extract an overlooked yet distinctive black British cosmopolitanism enunciated throughout his work. Sivanandan articulates, to my mind, one of the most compelling and fraught cases for an entanglement between black Britain and notions of the cosmopolitan.

There are two discrete but related moments through which Sivanandan articulates the shifting transnational and cosmopolitan alliances that constitute the political and discursive realization of black Britain. The first moment can be characterized as a "mosaic of unities" resourced through anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles after the First World War (8). This was a period where "coalition-building" associations were developing in order to politically garner the intertwined realities of African, Asian and Caribbean peoples living in Britain. A few landmark alliances were made in this period. First, the West African Students' Union (1925), which banded together students from West African countries studying in the UK into a politically minded organization that actively opposed racism and colonialism. Soon after, the League of Coloured Peoples (1931) came together, and concerned itself

with "the welfare of coloured peoples in all parts of the world" alongside "the improvement of relations between the races" (qtd. in Sivanandan 7). Most importantly, however, in 1937 a collection of black writers and activists – which included C.L.R. James, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta and Ras Makonnen – formed the International African Service Bureau, which by 1944 became the British branch of the Pan-African Congress Movement. In October of 1945 the Fifth Pan-African Congress would meet in Manchester, an event that was provoked by India's struggle for Independence and which would go on to mark a significant moment for anti-imperial struggles across the world. For Sivanandan, because of these burgeoning alliances:

> this period was beginning to break down island and ethnic affiliations and associations and to re-form them in terms of the immediate realities of social and racial relations, engendering in the process strong community bases for the shop floor battles to come. But different interests predicated different unities and a different racialism engendered different though similar organisational impulses. There was no one unity – or two or three – but a mosaic of unities. (8)

The re-formulation of "island and ethnic affiliations" set the stage for the flexible conception of black Britain that was soon to unfold. In this moment, the deconstructive impulses of these alliances were brought about through politically pragmatic means, in ways that would advance specifically anti-racist and anti-colonial agendas. This is the moment Alison Donnell refers to when she argues for the "international, transnational, and cosmopolitan identifications" that were fostered by the first generation of "black intellectuals and writers in Britain" ("Nation and Contestation" 12). However, for Sivanandan, the alliances represented here capture

only a fragmented sense of unity, one that was still divided and dormant. These "mosaic of unities" were a stepping-stone from which a more comprehensive unity could flourish.

As the colonies gained independence and more migrants began to settle in Britain, "the mosaic of unities and organisations" began to "resolve" themselves, for Sivanandan, "into a more holistic, albeit shifting, pattern of black unity and black struggle" (8-9). This was a period in the 1950s and 1960s through which more aggressive anti-racist and multi-racial alliances began to evolve, particularly in response to the growth of British fascism and the institutionalization of racism. This "holistic" second moment marked a distinct Afro-Asian ("slave/coolie") alliance that was brought together by the likes of the Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD) and the Conference of Afro-Asian-Caribbean Organisations (CAACO). The civil rights movement in the United States amplified much of the energy behind these political and cultural unities. After Malcolm X's visit to London in 1965, for instance, the more militant Racial Action Adjustment Society (RAAS) came together to fight for the rights of African, Caribbean and Asian workers in Britain, and beyond. To Sivanandan, these alliances "marked a progression in the *organic* unity" of Afro-Asian struggles that the second generation would later "forge anew" (16; 23). The motley of unities identified earlier effectively transformed into a more single-minded "black unity and … black struggle" (23).

My interest in Sivanandan's articulation of these two moments is twofold. First, his attention to these earlier discursive instances in the formation of black Britain accounts for an historical narrative that is often sidelined by those who are concerned with contemporary black British culture. Second, and more importantly, his enunciation of each moment – from the "mosaic" allegiances of the 1940s to the

"holistic" unities of the 1960s – rhetorically exposes a desire for a cohesive conception of the black in Britain; in other words, within these moments, Sivanandan reveals what I want to identify as a cosmopolitan vocabulary that attempts to make common the particular experiences of Britain's black communities. Through the language of unity, wholeness and the organic, Sivanandan resources a specific cosmopolitanism that is articulated as both a unity of anti-racisms and an appeal to multi-ethnic and transnational alliances. His analysis of black Britain in these two moments serves as an example of the ways in which he articulates a cosmopolitan project inspired by an attempt to valorize and universalize the "black" unities embedded within the political formation of black Britain.

We can trace the specific contours of Sivanandan's celebration of cosmopolitanism in his essay "The Liberation of the Black Intellectual" (1974). Moving from anti-racism to black liberation, Sivanandan is concerned here with the peculiar contradictions facing the black intellectual. Following Sartre's contention that the intellectual symbolizes a kind of tortured and contradictory universality which balances the bourgeois world of his scholarship alongside the political domain in which it circulates, Sivanandan argues that it is the black intellectual who faces the real contradiction. His is a specific universality "that is particular to colour" and "keened to the sense of oppression"; compared to his white counterpart, he faces the predicament of representing "a less universal universality" (85). In order to reclaim and enhance this diluted universality, Sivanandan reframes the black intellectual as a confident *citizen of the world* who is reenergized through the "living traditions and values" within Africa and Asia (89). As a means to expound a universal tradition available for the black (Afro-Asian) intellectual, Sivanandan argues that there is something unique about African and Asian societies that enable a valuable

cosmopolitan sense of being in the world, distinct from so-called Western societies. He cites D.K. Chisiza in a quotation that captures these worldly views. Specifically in Africa, Chisiza explains that:

> Charity begins at home. So does the love of our fellow-human beings. By loving our parents, our brothers, our sisters and cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces, and by regarding them as members of our families, we cultivate the habit of loving lavishly, of exuding human warmth, of compassion, and of giving and helping … Once so conditioned, one behaves in this way not only to one's family, but also the clan, the tribe, the nation, and to humanity as a whole. (Chisiza 32)

Chisiza's commentary on the cosmopolitanism of African societies remains foundational to Sivanandan's argument. Through these coaxial series of allegiances outlined by Chisiza, Sivanandan makes explicit the ways in which the black intellectual can draw upon a non-Western tradition of transcendence and universality. It is here that Sivanandan most explicitly locates the translocal, transnational and multi-ethnic sensibilities that enable the shifting alliances of black unities and struggles. He valorizes the worldly perspectives accessible to the black (Afro-Asian) intellectual, and indeed black movements in general.

By attempting to enhance the universal discourses available to the black intellectual, Sivanandan problematically essentializes the black subject, despite its multi-ethnic and worldly enunciation. But what is rather of more interest is the cosmopolitan direction to which Sivanandan turns in his attempt to account for the translocal and transnational allegiances of the black intellectual. While Sivanandan does not use the term cosmopolitanism, in many ways he creates and draws upon a

distinctly Stoic conception of world citizenship and cross-cultural examination that has been most recently championed by the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. In order to expound a politically relevant conception of cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum recruits the Stoic philosophers of classical antiquity (Seneca, Hierocles, Panaetius and Cicero) to demonstrate a model of the *kosmou polites* (world citizen) that values shifting identifications and alliances. As Nussbaum tells us (via the Stoics), to become a citizen of the world, one needs to think of oneself inside a series of concentric circles:

> The first one is drawn around the self; the next takes in one's immediate family; then follows the extended family; then, in order, one's neighbors or local group, one's fellow city-dwellers, one's fellow countrymen…. Beyond all these circles is the largest one, that of humanity as a whole. (60)

This model of concentric world citizenship bears striking resemblance to Chisiza's articulation of an African cosmopolitanism. Both depend upon an ability to extend one's allegiances outside the realm of the local and national, and both ultimately value this endeavour because it enables a planetary perspective that includes all of humanity. The language of cohesiveness and wholeness, which we found in Sivanandan's conception of black unity in Britain, again crops up as a means to signal an engagement with universalizing discourses of identification. I want to be clear: I am not attempting to refigure Sivanandan's thinking in so-called Western or Eurocentric terms; rather, I wish to signal the ways in which his conception of blackness remains intellectually entangled within an explicit history of cosmopolitan thinking. Sivanandan's argument in "The Liberation of the Black Intellectual" offers thought-provoking insights into the planetary allegiances attributed to the sign of

blackness. His understanding of the black intellectual as a citizen of the world suggests a productive avenue from which to envision the concentric qualities of a "holistic" black unity in Britain.

The coaxial pliability which Sivanandan embeds within the signifier black remains different, however, from Mercer's more slippery articulation of the term. For Mercer, the "political translation of *black*" in Britain is invigorated through a more postmodern line of thinking. Following Hall, "black" as a sign of difference is understood as "positional, conditional, and conjunctural," a shifting signifier that refuses to infinitely slide in the name of a concrete politics ("New Ethnicities" 29). Because of this, the "racializing code of 'color'" can continually be "put *under erasure*." For Sivanandan, black is conceptualized as a more unified signifier that *slides even less* as a means to assert a desirably cohesive and more oppositional political framework. Yet, what connects these two articulations of the "black" in black Britain is that for each critic the conjunction registers everyday "coalition-building identifications." That is, the term black British is best grasped not through racial or national avenues, but rather the multiplicity of transnational and translocal allegiances the term has historically encompassed. In translating the term black British (and the category of black British writing in particular) for the twenty-first century, this thesis draws upon the transnational histories and cosmopolitan possibilities *entrenched within the term*. By soliciting a creatively flexible notion of black Britain, I signal a shift in contemporary black British writing (and here I agree with John McLeod) that is attempting to construct radically new transnational unities and multi-ethnic alliances. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the ways in which twenty-first-century black British writers have figured distinct modes of cosmopolitan representations.

The chapters that follow can best be conceptualized as three discrete moments, or "signs of history" which have been critically resourced by contemporary black British writers in a bid to recover particular cosmopolitan histories, affinities and opportunities. These moments represent historical conjunctures that have provoked a specific politics and poetics of (re)imagination, a cosmopolitan dialectic that looks back as much its looks forward. I follow Hall's definition of the conjunctural, which marks "a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape" ("Interpreting the Crisis" 57). The texts examined here revisit these moments in ways that expose the cultural, political and aesthetic stakes of each conjuncture, and by doing so, enunciate the various modes of cosmopolitan representation that remain attentive to the shifting unities, alliances and affiliations within twenty-first-century black British writing.

Chapter one investigates the ways contemporary black British writers have refigured the abiding cultural significance of the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* – the ex-troopship which became a talismanic marker of postwar migration from Britain's colonies. I explore the representational weight of this moment, which consistently formulates 1948 (the year of the *Windrush*'s docking) as a uniquely productive and usable past. James Berry's *Windrush Songs* (2007) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) cultivate an engagement with this moment that attempts to redeem scenes of inhospitality as a counter-intuitive mode of conviviality. By reading the theoretical literature on conviviality – particularly through the work of Paul Gilroy and Jasbir Puar – against Berry's and Levy's creative figuring of the term, I seek to delineate the ways in which these writers realize the limitations of cosmopolitanism through their explorations into the more contingent and precarious

aspects of the convivial. Both Berry's *Windrush Songs* and Levy's *Small Island* tactically return to the year 1948 in order to trace a complex and spuriously formative moment in the creation of a multi-ethnic Britain. Through the formal features of their texts, Berry and Levy venture to recuperate moments in which violence, discomfort and the inhospitable dominate. In their reimagining of 1948, these writers forge convivial encounters at the level of form and content, creating in the process new contexts from which to propound what the idea of convivial cohabitation might actually entail.

Chapter two traces the entanglement of two events in the early 1980s – the 1981 Brixton uprising and the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War – as a means to identify a curiously unexplored and contradictory historical conjuncture revisited in Alex Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane* (2001), Linton Kwesi Johnson's *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* (2002), and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). These writers discrepantly reimagine early 1980s Britain in ways that attend to the slippery alliances between the frontlines of black resistance movements and the dynamics of Thatcher's postimperialism. Each text articulates a mode of cosmopolitanism that challenges easy binaries between the local and the global, the community and the masses, the subaltern and the hegemonic. These writers offer three different *cosmopolitan articulations* (or *dis*articulations in the case of Smith) that foster interpretive spaces from which to refigure a more globally inflected and pluralized conception of the early 1980s. Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane* fractures the seemingly cohesive and progressive ties within the black community in 1981 Brixton. The novel attempts to dislocate the notion of an organic site of resistance in its representation of a postimperial Brixton that mimics, to some extent, the repressive power structures enacted by the state. Instead of constructing a coming together of an exclusively

local community, Wheatle's text turns to outer-national affiliations (with Ireland and the African diaspora) to mark its rebellious cosmopolitan allegiances. Linton Kwesi Johnson's Penguin Modern Classics collection of verse *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* offers a paratextually conceived poetics – specific to 1980s Britain – that unearths a more meditative rhetoric of transnational and translocal protest. Penguin's paratextual reframing of Johnson's poetry marks a process of what I term "Penguinizing Dub" which enables fresh comparative readings of old poems in ways that demonstrate how these verses can be recontextualized in transnational ways. By poetically reenergizing transnational and translocal alliances, Johnson's Modern Classics text articulates a poetic cosmopolitanism that imagines new connections between resistance movements from around the world. Unlike *East of Acre Lane* and *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, *White Teeth* persistently questions the possibility of a progressive cosmopolitanism, especially "from below." By considering the historical baggage within Smith's novel alongside the current critical trend to read *White Teeth* as quintessentially cosmopolitan, I argue that through the satirical "subaltern" figure of Samad (the novel's much-discussed Bangladeshi migrant), Smith mocks demotic conceptions of cosmopolitanism, as Samad's ventriloquism of Thatcher's rhetorically polite Powellism unsettles the necessarily progressive position of the subaltern needed for a truly productive "cosmopolitanism from below." Samad becomes a vicarious Thatcher that provocatively realigns the conservative tendencies of the text.

In contradistinction to previous chapters, chapter three is not formed around a "sign of history" that is commonly associated with the concerns of black British writing. The historical bearings of this chapter – 1989 – stand as a marker for the end of the Cold War and the beginnings of a neoliberal global order, each of which have

informed contemporary discourses of cosmopolitanism. As a means to read the current significance of this emergent historical sign within the parameters of contemporary black British writing, I look to Mike Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself* (2000) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (2005) – two texts in this study that delineate an explicitly worldly outlook and dispensation. Both Phillips' and Evaristo's texts are set predominantly outside the boundaries of Britain, taking us to the Cold War geographies of Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Their reimagining of 1989 offers not only a means to consider the neglected entanglements between black Britishness and the Cold War, but also an avenue from which to make sense of the neoliberal tendencies within each text's enunciation of cosmopolitanism. In turning to Eastern Europe, Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself* fashions a distinctly global imaginary which delineates a stylized cosmopolitanism through its use of symbolically laden scenes of diasporic migration, global community, trans-European travel and sameness. I argue that the novel's earnest representation of cosmopolitan themes reveals its textual performance of cosmopolitanism as a mere stylization, one that lays bare its troubling neoliberal and Anglocentric sensibilities. Revisiting the same historical moment, Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* offers instead a more radical reimagining of 1989 that transfigures the relationship between black Britishness and the world in ways that revel in the vertiginous consequences of (automotive) cosmopolitan movements. At the heart of my analysis lies the novel's Russian Lada, which I suggest functions as a cipher in the narrative that values a dislocated politics of black Britishness grounded in the peripatetic activities of its mixed-raced characters. This focus on the Lada and its movements around Europe, particularly the Middle East, spotlights the novel's implicit discussion of petrol-politics and the coming post-Cold War world order.

Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* remains one of the most prescient texts discussed in this thesis as it charts renewed connections between black Britain and the so-called Muslim world, a relationship that was irreparably fractured during the fallout of the Rushdie Affair.

By way of conclusion, I want to emphasize that these chapters do not articulate a periodization of the reimaginative work of contemporary black British writers; rather, their historical conceptualization reflects my attempt to trace certain conjunctures and "signs of history" that have preoccupied black British writers concerned with a distinctly literary cosmopolitanism. I borrow the term "sign of history" from Jean-François Lyotard as a means to identify the ways these writers have pluralized the representation of these three important yet unstable historical moments ("Universal History").[3] Black British writing has often revisited the past in ways that demonstrate an investment and cultural stake in the construction of various narratives of history. My thesis is concerned with the ways in which recent black British texts have gravitated towards particular historical moments in order to articulate cosmopolitan gestures grounded in history but not over determined it. As I will now proceed to demonstrate, the conjunction of cosmopolitanism and black

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[3] In his essay "Universal History and Cultural Differences," Lyotard argues that "the great narratives" of modernity have persistently rendered themselves "invali[d]" and "barely credibly" (318). He draws attention to specific "signs of history" (Budapest 1956, May 1968, and the Great Depression of 1929) that have reified the defaillancy, or failure, of such grand narratives: Budapest 1956 "refute[s] the doctrine of historical materialism"; May 1968 "refutes the doctrines of parliamentary liberalism"; and the crashes of 1929 "refute the doctrine of economic liberalism" (318). These "signs of history" are less a reference to the actual events than the responses and judgments they illicit (for a detailed discussion of the concept of judgment, see "The Sign of History"). Historical moments become "signs of history" because they provoke the idea that a plurality of narratives must exist in order to constitute these signs; put simply, they point to moments that demonstrate a fracturing of history where new possibilities for thinking can emerge. I use the term "sign of history" throughout this thesis in order to mark how contemporary black British writers have constructed certain historical conjunctures (1948; 1981/1982; 1989) in, as Lyotard would put it, "antimythologizing" ways ("Universal History" 319). The "signs of history" featured in this thesis remain attentive to how these writers figure particular conjunctures in the service of uncovering new, often unexpected, narratives and stories.

British often happens with recourse to specific "signs of history," so that cosmopolitan futurity emerges through a critical reconsideration of the past.

1   1948, Convivial Encounters
The Arrival of the *Windrush*

During a lecture delivered at the Literature of the Commonwealth Festival in Manchester (2002), the late Montserratian poet, writer and academic E.A. Markham recalled a remark made by the Barbadian novelist George Lamming concerning Caribbean migration to Britain in the 1950s. Lamming offers Markham an image "of a young Englishwoman wandering downstairs one Sunday morning, shocked to see a black man, a stranger, stretched out on her couch" ("Roots and Roots" 22). This uncomfortable, yet intimate confrontation captured what Lamming sought to redress about the iconic Windrush moment, namely that "*both sides* of the encounter – hosts and guests … were deceived": "the hosts weren't really consulted and the guests were lied to" (22; my emphasis). Throughout his lecture, Markham expresses his dissatisfaction with the literary and cultural discourses surrounding the so-called Windrush moment, in which (as we are insistently told) 492 Jamaican migrants on the SS *Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury in June of 1948.[1] With Sam Selvon's emblematic 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners* dominating the literary imagination of the *Windrush*, Markham argues for the need to uncover "new frames of reference" and "new contexts" from which to reimagine the circumstance of its arrival, ones that crucially moves beyond or modify the enduring "folksiness and exoticism" we

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[1] The date often associated with the arrival of the *Windrush* – 22 June 1948 – has been contested by numerous sources alongside the notion that only 492 Jamaicans were on the ship. Such popular claims have overshadowed the other passengers on the ex-troopship, namely the stowaways and the Polish migrants, who, when read in relation to the Jamaican passengers, capture the multiple (and neglected) histories of mobility that the *Windrush* inevitably represents. For a detailed overview of the discrepancies associated with the cultural memory of the *Windrush*, see Matthew Mead (2009).

find in Selvon's text (22). It is the image of the young Englishwoman – Markham suggests – that provocatively animates such renewed "frames of reference."

That encounter between the Englishwoman and the black man inspires a poem in the lecture, which Markham pens as if he were Lamming. Ironically entitled, "On George Lamming's Couch," the poem lyrically details the difficulties that such an encounter might entail:

> So, she comes down in a nightie revealing
> More than she intended: something has disturbed
> The Sunday-morning snooze: *what are you doing here*?
> She asks the stranger on the couch. She has seen him
> In the street, one of his colour: does he speak
> Her language through those lips? Can they spirit
> Themselves through the keyhole: *what are you doing here*? (22)

In these first few lines, the speaker recounts a narrative of the event (largely through the young woman's perspective) by following her down the steps as she first meets the "intruder" in her home. From the first line, the woman is exposed and vulnerable – before she meets him, she is already "revealing" too much of herself. Her conscious lack of clothing creates a forced yet intimate scene where we find an uninvited, hostile encounter between two strangers. Confused and "disturbed," she crassly interrogates this man while attempting to figure out how he has "spirit[ed]" his way into her home. She goes on:

> *I'm English and this is my castle*. She will banish
> Fear and do the normal thing; ask for evidence
> Of his claim to the couch. You get away with things
> When your nerve holds: will he touch her before

> She can wake the house? And through those lips, yes, he asks
> *To go to the bathroom*. So he can't live here, after all. (22-23)

The couch becomes metonymic here of the woman's fortressed home. She requires "evidence" to this man's "claim" to the couch, as if he were, as Markham puts it, a "defendant in Court" (23). The acute lack of dialogue in this encounter – the man cannot even articulate his counterclaim – illustrates that it is impossible for the Englishwoman to consider living with this black man. He is granted only one line in the poem, a request for a semblance of hospitability. If, in Markham's lyrical enunciation, the couch represents a precarious and necessarily contingent place of meeting and living, then it is one that remains both exclusionary and discriminatory: the man knows he cannot live in this space. There is, simply, no chance for cohabitation on this couch.

As a means to propose "new contexts" or "frames of reference" that might productively reshape discussions concerning the *Windrush*, Markham's poem offers a bleak one-sided confrontation that can best be described as an unsuccessful or failed attempt at living together. What, then, is the literary and cultural value of such a representation of the Windrush moment? What are we to make of this gloomy depiction between "host" and "guest" where we find, what appears to be, an explicitly un-generative impasse between the two? I want to suggest that it is less the subject of Markham's poem that propounds a unique "new context" (although its details remain significant), and more the ways in which Markham reimagines this moment – a dynamic that is of crucial significance to my argument in this chapter. In his poetic figuring of the interaction between the young Englishwoman and the black man, Markham writes his verses from multiple proxy positions. He composes the text as if he was Lamming, writing a "poem that George may have had in mind"

(Markham, "Roots and Roots" 22). This imagined Lamming-cum-Markham then invents a voice through the speaker in the poem, who goes on to depict the ensuing encounter from the purview of the young Englishwoman, and, for a fleeting moment, the black man on the couch. This tactical and ironic appropriation of voices designs shifting "frames of reference" that enunciate the ability (and value) of attempting to occupy positions other than one's own.

Such flexible perspectival adjustments offer an iteration of what Paul Gilroy has delineated as a Montesquieuian "cosmopolitan position" shaped through a "carefully cultivated degree of estrangement" (*After Empire* 78). Inspired by Montesquieu's epistolary novel *Persian Letters* (1721), Gilroy argues that this Enlightenment philosopher "seems to have been among the first thinkers to suggest that we must learn to practice a systematic form of disloyalty to our local civilization if we seek either to understand it or to interact equitably with others … ": the act of "imagining oneself as a stranger in a limited and creative sense," that which Montesquieu performs in his ventriloquizing of the Persian travellers, "might instructively be linked to actually becoming estranged from the cultural habits one is born to" (79; 78). While Gilroy identifies an ethical bearing in Montesquieu's work through his creative ability to take up the role of the outsider, Markham amends this imaginative role playing by suggesting that it is equally valuable to conceive of oneself in the role of the insider: the host, the young Englishwoman. For both Gilroy and Markham, estrangement from one's own subject position affords an "educative" experience – what we might want to call, a writerly (and readerly) form of cosmopolitanism from below (Gilroy, *After Empire* 79).

In their reimagining of the Windrush moment, the texts in this chapter thematize and interrogate the "cosmopolitan positions" that Markham and

Montesquieu respectively inhabit. By examining James Berry's recent, and overlooked, collection of poetry *Windrush Songs* (2007) alongside Andrea Levy's phenomenally successful novel *Small Island* (2004), this chapter traces the ways in which these twenty-first-century writers have attempted to compose "new contexts," framed through uniquely demotic (to borrow a term from Gilroy) conceptions of cosmopolitanism, from which to re-engage the enduring cultural consequences of the SS *Empire Windrush*'s arrival. This specific sign of history (1948) – its pre-history and its cultural force in the present – becomes exacted by Berry and Levy as a distinctive "usable past" whereby "past experience" is "placed at the service of the future" (Brooks 340).[2] Such a future is constituted by both of these writers through fresh and provocative contexts of cohabitation informed by the missed opportunities that have become characteristic of the Windrush moment.

Each writer attempts to capture the estranging and difficult cross-cultural interactions (poignantly encapsulated by Markham's poem) that the arrival of the ex-troopship necessarily provoked; in doing this, both texts "use" the historical moment of the *Windrush* as a means to reconfigure this conjuncture in specifically cosmopolitan ways. With Berry's collection, we find a polyphonic poetic account of the *Windrush* that seamlessly shifts between the differing voices that have animated the voyage of the ex-troopship, from those in the Caribbean, on the ship itself, to those migrants newly arrived on England's shores. Berry's collection is shaped by an overt desire to reconstitute the failed connections of 1948. His poetry, through which I offer a deliberately focused reading, demonstrates instances of what it might mean

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[2] American literary critic Van Wyck Brooks first coined the concept of a "usable past" in 1918 by arguing that the American arts lacked a clear sense of historical referents that might cohesively constitute a more dynamic and creative portrayal of the contemporary moment. Brooks saw the past as a key (neglected) resource needed for the intellectual and creative fertilization of criticism. As he writes: "[t]he past is an inexhaustible storehouse of apt attitudes and adaptable ideals; it opens of (sic) itself at the touch of desire; it yields up, now this treasure, now that, to anyone who comes to it armed with a capacity for personal choices" (339).

to "com[e] together" in 1940s London in ways that remain attentive to the material realities of both "hosts" and "guests" (Berry, *Windrush Songs* 12). Levy's *Small Island* also offers a polyphonic depiction of the Windrush moment through the interweaving stories of its four narrators: two English, two Jamaican. By acting as a proxy writer for these four voices, Levy explicitly inhabits multiple "cosmopolitan positions" that invite readers to cultivate an "educative" and revelatory bearing that crucially brings the stories together. Levy's novel, in many ways, devises a thought-provoking, but ultimately problematic, translation of Markham's poem in prose form.

Importantly, neither Berry nor Levy revisits 1948 in order to recover an aggrandizing past that solicits an uncritical and salutary cosmopolitan perspective. These writers are less interested in the "irresistible rise of multi-racial Britain" that the *Windrush* purportedly heralded, than the, at times, inoperative difficulties that have shaped what we now deem to be Britain's multiculturalism (Phillips and Phillips). The texts in this chapter are particularly interested in the dilemmas we find in Markham's poem, which powerfully enunciate new ways of conceiving the significance of the *Windrush* in the twenty-first century through poignant moments of impasse and failed encounters. Thus, while these texts are concerned with a distinctly cosmopolitan reimagining of the past, they are more crucially invested in what I argue to be the predicaments of conviviality.

As we colloquially know it, conviviality is a term associated with a jovial feasting: a gathering for drink, food and merriment. From its Latin derivative *convivium* – which is constituted by a component of the preposition *con* (which means with) and the verb *vivere* (which means to live) – conviviality literally means a coming together: living with others. Conviviality can refer to a spatial dimension, a

place to eat, drink and be merry, but it can also refer to an affective and material

dimension, that gauges the relations produced in the vexed attempts to live together.[3]

Conviviality as a critical praxis and aesthetic modality highlights for this chapter an

important yet contradictory aspect of cosmopolitanism. Against the discourses of

cultivation and edification that cosmopolitanism encapsulates, conviviality captures

a more precarious set of conditions that identifies spontaneous, unexpected, often

failed, and un-generative moments of interaction. If cosmopolitanism (particularly in

Paul Gilroy's sense of the term) signifies a concept that validates its utility through

successful acts of cross-cultural enlightenment, then conviviality challenges this

process by recognizing the significance of failed or unsuccessful moments of cross-

cultural interaction.[4] Conviviality, as Jasbir Puar reminds us, does not necessarily

lead to a "politics of the universal or inclusive common"; rather, it more concretely

represents "the futurity enabled through the open materiality of bodies as a Place to

Meet" (Puar 168). The notion of a convivial encounter frames this chapter by

offering a terminology that can account for and recover the value of hostile

confrontations, failed interactions and antagonistic miscommunications.

Both Berry and Levy creatively draw upon the language of conviviality

(alongside or against cosmopolitanism) as a means to emphasize the overwhelming

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[3] A number of cultural critics have examined the concept of conviviality, through various paradigms and contexts. For examples see: Mbembe 2001; Gilroy 2004; Nava 2007; Puar 2009.

[4] Conviviality is a key structuring term in Gilroy's *After Empire* (2004). In the preface to the book, Gilroy defines the concept in this way: conviviality "refer[s] to the processes of cohabitation and interaction that has made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere" (xi). It is a term that moves away from notions of identity into the politics of identification. As Gilroy tells us, "[t]he radical openness that brings conviviality alive makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity and turns attention towards the always-unpredictable mechanism of identification" (xi). My own conception of conviviality draws from Gilroy's eloquent articulation of the term here; however, particularly with the texts I examine, I attempt to offer a more literary rendering of the concept, conceived firstly, in less optimistic terms, and secondly, in contradistinction to notions of the cosmopolitan. For me, Gilroy's enunciation of the unpredictable and necessarily affective qualities of conviviality introduces an important tension in his analysis which conflicts with his humanistic (i.e. rationalist) approach to cosmopolitanism. It is this conflicting dynamic between conviviality and cosmopolitanism that centrally interests this chapter.

contingencies that have shaped the Windrush moment. These writers importantly avoid depicting the arrival of the ex-troopship as a genesis moment for black communities in Britain. They do not engage with the *Windrush* as an "immutable" "homogenous" event that has become "part of a national narrative which effaces the very history of mobility it otherwise describes" (Mead 138). The way in which Berry and Levy interact with this history indicates a shift away from the rhetorical "source of British self-congratulation" that the *Windrush* has increasingly come to stand for (Hall, "Postscript" 188).[5] By returning to this moment as a means to uncover the uncomfortable and failed encounters between "hosts" and "guests," these writers "use" the *Windrush* to pluralize its history in relation to other, entangled stories and experiences. What these texts lack, then, is any sense of a congratulatory conception of the Windrush moment. They remind us of the enduring relevance of this culturally potent moment by provocatively fracturing it in order to question its purportedly "irresistible" features (Phillips and Phillips).

Aeolian Poetics: Entangling Conviviality in James Berry's *Windrush Songs*

> Entanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited.
>
> – Sarah Nuttall (*Entanglement* 1)

Born in Boston, Jamaica in 1924, James Berry, like his Caribbean contemporaries – Sam Selvon, George Lamming, and Andrew Salkey – remains a key literary figure

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[5] In the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of the *Windrush* in 1998, a number of important studies were published (all in the same year), which, caught in the tide of commemorations, rearticulated the triumphant epochal nuances of the Windrush moment. See in particular: Francis 1998; Phillips and Phillips 1998; T. Sewell 1998; Wambu 1998.

of the so-called Windrush generation, one whose creative output, particularly in the field of poetry and children's literature, has unfolded well into the twenty-first century.[6] His migration to England was just three months and one ship removed from the *Empire Windrush*. Arriving in Liverpool on the SS *Orbita* (the troopship that followed the *Windrush*) in October of 1948, Berry, like so many other Caribbean migrants of his generation, came to the "Motherland" looking for new horizons of opportunity unavailable in the stagnating economies of Britain's postwar colonies. From Liverpool, Berry moved on to Oxford, then eventually London where he began to develop his writing through poetic and short story forms while working as an international telegraphist with Cable & Wireless. Soon after spearheading The Bluefoot Travellers troupe in the early 1970s – a collection of British based Caribbean poetry-performing artists which included E.A. Markham – Berry compiled the groundbreaking anthology *Bluefoot Traveller* (1976; rev. 1981) which featured in its first edition the work of twelve Caribbean poets who were living in Britain. In its revised form, the anthology included not only more women poets, but also "writers who were born in Britain or have spent most of their childhood here" (Berry, *Bluefoot Traveller* 6). This conscious representational shift marked the beginnings of an explicit discursive transformation of Caribbean poetry in Britain into a distinctive *black British* poetry. While Berry's second anthology *News For Babylon* (1984) assembles a significantly larger scope of black poetry in Britain – Berry prefers the term "Westindian-British" – it is his first anthology *Bluefoot Traveller* (1981) that arguably inaugurates the first collection of black British poetic voices.

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[6] The twenty-first century texts in Berry's oeuvre include: *Around the World in 80 Poems* (for children [2001]); *A Nest Full of Stars* (for children [2002]); *Only One of Me* (for children [2004]); *Windrush Songs* (2007); *A Story I Am In: Selected Poems* (2011).

As Berry's own poetry and work in local schools began to garner increasing national exposure (he won, for instance, the 1981 National Poetry Prize and was awarded an Order of the British Empire in 1990), he soon became "the doyen" of black poets in Britain (Niven 296). Yet, despite what Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan identify as his "pioneering voice in Black British writing," Berry remains curiously overlooked in the critical literature within contemporary black British studies (143). Since he has been read predominantly as a first generation writer, Berry's work has almost solely been positioned in terms of its diasporic sensibilities or representation of migrant realities; his writing remains, in many ways, rigidly marked by the *Windrush* and the generation of Caribbean migrants it figuratively hails (Brown 1998; Procter 2003; Ford 2012). Such a positioning necessarily impedes a reading of Berry's work beyond "first generation" terms by making incongruent any dialogue between his writing and the more contemporary, "second generation" work of Andrea Levy, Caryl Phillips or Alex Wheatle.

To my mind however, through both his poetic and editorial interventions, Berry has actively upset these limiting generational categories that have dominated studies of black British writing. Indeed, while Berry is of the first generation of postwar Caribbean migrants, his work has functioned as a dynamic "conduit" *between* generations: those Caribbean poets living in Britain and those "born in" or having spent most of their lives in Britain (Markham, *Hinterland* 32). As Stewart Brown tells us, while Berry "has been very conscious of what it has meant to be black in Britain in the last half century he has never been willing to settle for isolation or the brand of black solidarity that amounts to a kind of willed segregation" ("James Berry" 46). Rather he is more interested in "bridge-building": thinking beyond race and generation as a means to "chang[e] the culture of Britain"

(46). It is this "bridge-building" quality that I suggest shapes Berry's work in ways that articulate its relevance to contemporary debates regarding black British writing and cosmopolitanism. His poetry in particular thematizes moments of encounter, dialogue and interaction as a means to intertwine seemingly discrepant histories, geographies and generations. Berry's writing lays bare a poignant and at times "unfashionable" (Brown's words) poetics of encounter that negotiates between the edifying language of cosmopolitanism and the more contingent qualities of conviviality ("James Berry" 46).

If I have so far reified the paradigm that chiefly places Berry as a first generation Windrush migrant, I tactically do so as a means to complicate such a mode of engagement. By rhetorically situating Berry (particularly through a biographical frame) in and of the Windrush moment, it is my contention that we can begin to productively unravel the significance of his delayed uptake of this conjuncture in his poetry collection *Windrush Songs* (2007). The political and aesthetic import of the collection derives precisely from the discursive weight given to the author's first generation status. Witness, for instance, the first few lines of Berry's introduction to the collection:

> In 1948 the SS *Empire Windrush*, an ex-troopship, sailed from the Caribbean to Tilbury Docks and initiated the biggest movement of Caribbean people to Britain. The *Windrush* came at such an important time for me and young men of my generation…. None of us wanted to grow up poverty stricken. We didn't want to grow up without knowledge of the world. (9)

Here, 1948 is articulated as a seminal sign that marks the ways in which the Windrush generation – to borrow a phrase from Mike and Trevor Phillips – "sailed

through a gateway in history" (6). Berry firmly locates himself within this first generation of Caribbean migrants who arrived in 1948. Much of his introduction, which offers a short biography of a life constellated by the *Windrush*, follows this retrospective line. The twenty-first century publication of the collection introduces, then, a provocative temporal tension within the text that arbitrates a specific historical dispensation (1948) through a distinctively contemporary enunciation (2007). It is through an exploration of this tension – between the immediacy of the event and its belated rendering – that I position my reading of the collection.

Such reimaginative tactics, alongside what I argue to be the collection's enunciation of an explicit cosmopolitan discourse, fundamentally inform the critical scope of my analysis. In those initial introductory lines, Berry figures the *Windrush* as emblematic of the larger world, a vessel that enabled not only freedom of movement but also an expansion of the mind. The *Windrush* becomes a discursive marker of a usable past that, in its rearticulation, not only offers opportunities for cultivating an edifying cosmopolitanism, but also, as we shall see, a specific modality of convivial "bridge-building." As Berry tells us, "[t]he bigger meaning of the voyage of the *Windrush* was that it brought change to two peoples: those who had come from a background of slavery in the Caribbean, and those whose society had benefited from that slave labour" (*Windrush Songs* 12). In attempting to recover a potentially new conception of the *Windrush*'s significance, Berry contends that the larger significance of this single ship derives from the ways it instigated a confrontation with Britain's colonial past in conjunction with an encounter between two societies fundamentally connected by the violence of this history. The rendering of such a provoked encounter in the introduction remains, however, subtly estranged from its historical moment: the supposed provocation of change and transformation

is unrealized and latent. If the *Windrush* "brought change to two peoples," then their "coming together," Berry tells us, still remains "a hope" and "a challenge" (12). Despite what may initially appear to be a salutary uptake of the *Windrush*, Berry proposes a cautiously sceptical reimagining of 1948 that depicts the event of the *Windrush*'s docking as primarily a *missed* opportunity. The collection itself becomes distinctly contemporary because of this, as it attempts to re-evaluate the Windrush moment while exploring the complicated dynamics of what "coming together" might actually entail.

Given Berry's discerning disposition here, it is more than perplexing that *Windrush Songs* has yet to garner any sustained critical attention.[7] Launched on June 28 2007 at a celebration of the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade in London, the collection appears to have has been lost in the flurry of commemorations that followed both the bicentenary and the 2008 sixtieth anniversary of the arrival of the *Windrush*. But *Windrush Songs* remains a uniquely twenty-first-century text that offers a rare critical outlook on the event of the *Windrush*. Unlike other texts that examine the Windrush moment (contemporary or otherwise), Berry shapes the hope for what he identifies as a "coming together" into a primarily *worldly* endeavour. In his discussion of the challenges prompted by the *Windrush*, Berry writes of a "human family," "the people of the world" and the "world before *Windrush*" (*Windrush Songs* 12). Rhetorically, he refigures the arrival of the *Windrush* as less of a black British moment than a critical global juncture that signalled the potential to "bring change and opportunities for development and enlightenment" (12).

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[7] Dave Gunning's recent introductory guide *Postcolonial Literature* (2013) offers the only close reading of Berry's *Windrush Songs* to date.

The *Windrush* inspires the cosmopolitan ethos of the collection by functioning as a frame which instigates a cultivation of awareness, insight or revelation. Poems such as "A Greater Oneness," "In the Land and Sea Culture-crossed," and the five "Sea-Songs," register Berry's attempt to offer an edifying cosmopolitanism forged by the event of the *Windrush*'s arrival. The speaker in "A Greater Oneness" tells us, for instance, that he "goin Englan to speed up / what Empire started" (73). This discernable Windrush migrant proffers his vision of how "all faces of difference / will come together with one face"; how these "multifarious faces" represent the "greater oneness" (the "ever growing humanity") that his journey to England necessarily provokes (73). The speaker enunciates a version of Louise Bennett's poem "Colonization in Reverse" (1966), but without the "scorn, self-love and pride" associated with Empire (73). The gradual cultivation of a "coming together" envisioned by this poem offers a holistic account of the significance of the *Windrush* wrought through the balancing dynamics of the natural world. The ship becomes a sign of the harmonious movements between "daylight" and "night-time" which enables the "earth to gestate" – its docking transforms into a completion of an incubated cycle started by the machinations of Empire, but rectified and brought to its resolution in an inversion of the colonization process enacted by the Windrush migrants (73). The speaker's articulation of his desire to migrate becomes in many ways a revelatory act – he "sees," "believes" and "put[s] together" – that fosters a distinctly organic modality of "coming together" (73).

This figuration of "coming together" offers a poetic rendering of cosmopolitanism understood as a restorative process of cultivating planetary cross-cultural affiliations. Berry's poetry captures the notion of cultivation through horticultural and aquatic metaphors that shape a specific, ecologically minded

cosmopolitanism. The poem "In the Land and Sea Culture-crossed" proposes yet another holistic model of "coming together" precisely through this ecological sense of the world. The speaker's "call" to "widen our boundaries" and "com[e] together" is demonstrated through the generative image of a rotten fruit, caught by the ground, only "to grow again" (77). Berry associates the provocation of the *Windrush* as a re-cycling process that "rejuvenat[es]" an awareness of one's place in the world – the decaying fruit becomes a poignant metaphor for demonstrating the ways in which knowledge can be re-used and re-learned to fertilize a more inclusive and transformative sense of oneself *in relation* to others (77). It is not just the land, but also the sea that transfigures into a medium where this restorative cosmopolitanism enunciates itself. Each of the collection's "Sea-Songs" reiterates lyrical conceptions of the ocean as a place of "rebirth" (30), "balance" (40), and "contemplation" (74). Like the land, the sea is depicted as a generative space, which articulates the lofty hopes of those Windrush migrants journeying to England in 1948. The *Windrush*, in its movement through water and subsequent arrival on land, functions in these poems as a catalyst for new cross-cultural (or "culture-crossed") modes of being and reflection (77).

Gilroy's conception of demotic cosmopolitanism resonates, in many ways, with Berry's restorative cosmopolitanism, whereby enlightening acts of cultural estrangement produce an edifying ethics of encountering "others." But what happens when moments of cultural estrangement fail to produce revelation or awareness? How do we mark, or understand, the impasses within notions of cultivation where we find an inability to transform, or "come together"? In what follows, I want to suggest that Berry's collection offers us multiple modalities of "coming together" that poetically think through the encounter provoked by the *Windrush* in notably

dissonant ways. In contradistinction to "A Greater Oneness," "In the Land and Sea Culture-crossed" and the "Sea-Songs," Berry includes poems that question the edifying discourses surrounding cosmopolitanism in a lyrical move that, I argue, enunciates the more precarious, unexpected, potentially destructive yet critically rigorous idiom of conviviality. In explicitly positing the *Windrush* as a moment of encounter, Berry prompts an exploration into the oxymoronic qualities inherent within a convivial encounter which necessarily challenges cultivated modes of "coming together." His poetic articulation of conviviality enables a more complicated discussion of the *Windrush* which dwells upon the limits of "coming together" alongside the discomforts (and even violence) entangled within so-called cross-cultural moments of engagement. The type of poetic convivial praxis that I am interested in here consciously moves away from the climactic and (re)productive language of cosmopolitanism towards "failed" and "un-generative" moments of encounter that remain radically vulnerable to what Jasbir Puar has insightfully marked as "something other than what we might have hoped for" (169).

The opening poem of the collection – "Wind-rush" – inaugurates the first instance of an encounter that provocatively enunciates the predicaments of conviviality. The poem describes an account of a violent storm (most likely a reference to the 1944 Jamaican hurricane) that devastates a recognizably Caribbean landscape. The speaker of the poem delineates the storm as an event which frames not only the poem itself, but the collection as a whole. It begins with the following stanza:

> I'd like to set out a storm
> watching it like the dream it is
> watching the sea come

emptying its folds of boats (14)

The first few lines are constructed as if they were the opening to a story – the speaker arranges the narrative by signalling not only its place of action, but also a desire to recount the events that follow. While the poem appears to begin in a comfortable storytelling fashion, its first lines unsettle expectations by shirking any explicit engagement with the *Windrush* (the troopship). Berry's poetic rendering of "Wind-rush" "set[s] out" instead to delineate a more unexpected encounter, between the sea and the land, that marks a different iteration of "coming together," one that is violent and impetuous. As the storm overlays the landscape with "folds of boats" kneaded by the calamitous sea, the poem offers us another figurative instance of cultivation; however, rather than being restoratively generative, the lyrical cultivation provoked by the storm remains heedlessly destructive. By beginning the collection with a poem such as "Wind-rush," Berry disturbs our presumptions about a text unambiguously concerned with inscribing the significance of the SS *Empire Windrush*. He offers an unanticipated critical inflection within the poem that semantically transfigures the meaning of the *Windrush* as an encounter that might also explore the other, more precarious qualities of "coming together."

In his review of Berry's collection, Kei Miller reads "Wind-rush" as a poem that remains rhythmically hampered even as it suggests an unexpected representation of the ex-troopship. For Miller, the bulk of *Windrush Songs* articulates "more nostalgia than poignancy," and because of this, the "sheer ambition" of the collection, which traces a multitude of voices shaped by the legacy of the *Windrush*, translates into a largely uncritical engagement with its subject matter ("Sing Another One"). While Miller applauds the brutality invoked within "Wind-rush" – for instance, through the "plosive 'b' sounds" of the lines "I won't miss how breezeblow

madness / batter and beat up the place island-wide" – he argues that Berry ultimately strikes a "wrong note": "[i]n the two-line stanza that follows comes a repetition that feels more clumsy than artful; the poem stalls rather than swells" ("Sing Another One"). Miller is referring to the following stanza:

> How island-wide bugle-blow of wind
> batter and mash-up the place (14)

These two lines are amplified within the poem since they constitute the shortest stanza. Set against the previous (four-lined) stanza, which enunciates the harsh sounds of the battering wind, we expect a thematic or rhythmic intensification. This is the place in the poem where we would find the crescendo or the eye of the storm. Miller is quite right when he suggests that the poem "stalls rather than swells": the line "How island-wide bugle-blow of wind" remains a dissonant and awkward phrase that disrupts any patterned harmony. In the following three-lined stanza, the rhythm even begins to deflate in the dropped lines:

> screaming
>   plundering
>   crying. (14)

These last few lines puncture the potential for balanced or climactic cadences within the poem. They effectively temper the "swelling" of the poem, as they aurally and visually demonstrate the violent aftermath and waning of the storm. Yet, while Miller interprets this stalling as a "wrong note," I want to suggest that it marks precisely how the collection initiates a conversation about the inoperative qualities of conviviality rather than the climactic tendencies of a restorative cosmopolitanism. At

the level of form, Berry alerts us to not only a destructive modality of "coming together," but also a textual instance of rhythmic failure that resists producing a consummate rendering of the "Wind-rush"/*Windrush*.

The semantic break that "Wind-rush" enacts also signals the strategic ways in which the collection deploys ecological metaphors. By separating "wind" from "rush," Berry dismantles the *Windrush* as exclusively a sign of migration while paradoxically flagging a poetic uptake of wind inspired by the voyage of the infamous ex-troopship. Unlike horticultural or aquatic metaphors, the figurative use of wind denotes something more intangible, unpredictable and unexpected. This extraction of the "wind" becomes in effect a tactical means to introduce the contingent and precarious encounters stimulated by the arrival of the *Windrush*. Embedded within the hyphen that breaks the *Windrush*, Berry pluralizes the meaning of the voyage and opens it up to multiple readings and interpretations. The polyvocality of the collection, which traces the joys and frustrations of life in the Caribbean against the hopes and anxieties of migration, demonstrates the ways in which Berry both elaborates and complicates the unexpected narratives constellated by the movements of a single ship.

It is here that I want to designate the distinctly aeolian poetics of *Windrush Songs*. Such a poetics remains most obviously activated by the semantics of the word *Windrush*, but also, and more importantly, the entangling motility of wind. I borrow the term entanglement from Sarah Nuttall who has defined the concept in relation to certain cultural and literary formations in post-apartheid South Africa. As Nuttall explains:

> [e]ntanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted,

or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication. (1)

The notion of entanglement I am purposefully gleaning here *poetically* articulates particular "ways of being, modes of identity-making and of material life" (2). From a close reading of her prose, we find that Nuttall's enunciation of entanglement captures a striking aeolian sensibility that figuratively draws upon the unpredictable movements of the wind. The "twisted," "ensnaring," and "tangle[d]" characteristics of entanglement poignantly renders the contours and effects of the potential violence of wind. Nuttall's elegant locution of entanglement importantly suggests an alternative avenue from which to read the instance of an encounter in ways that dwell upon the intimate yet potentially destructive aspects of "coming together." Nuttall offers, in many ways, an iteration of conviviality – powered by a suggestively aeolian figuration – that rhetorically conceives the term's inoperative qualities.

Berry captures the peculiar and abiding importance of the *Windrush* by enunciating the ways in which it has constellated manifold narratives of entanglement. Within many of his poems, the condition of entanglement becomes a poetic opportunity to demonstrate the difficult histories that have shaped the sign of 1948. In "Old Slave Villages," Berry delineates the legacies of slavery that have slowly become eroded from an unidentified Caribbean landscape. The speaker marks the indiscriminate transformation of the land, as the "slave shacks" turn into "gardens" and the "great houses" into "school grounds – or hotels" (Berry, *Windrush* 22). This seamless transfiguration suggests an inconsiderate abrasion of the

landscape that appears to be erasing historical referents to the painful pasts embedded on and within the land. Yet, it is through the articulation of this erasure that the poem draws attention to the ways that these pasts have become entwined within the present, rather than completely effaced. As the "cattle graz[e]" they feed upon the "pastures" that were once "fields of sugar cane," while the "garden[s]" flourish from the soil that once supported "[t]hatched slave shacks" (22). The poem complicates and tangles mundane accounts of cattle, gardens, houses, schools and hotels with the past material realities of slavery that seem to remain conspicuously hidden.

This lyrical conception of entanglement, which depends upon the dissonance between the past and the present, notably works against the more organized and harmonious formal features of the poem. Unlike "Wind-rush," "Old Slave Villages" retains tight rhythmic control: the poem's six couplets each constitute a consistent rhythmic unit, where the second line metrically closes the verse. There is no discordant "wrong note" or awkwardly "clumsy" line; rather, the poem yields the snares of entanglement within an oddly balanced format. Once more the wind features as a configuring factor within the form of the poem. As the speakers tells us in the first two lines: "The windmills are dead / Their tombs are empty towers" (22). The absence of wind is immediately foregrounded here – its lack tellingly revealing the decaying mark of a forgotten past. Without the entangling motility of the wind (one that we saw in "Wind-rush"), the poem mimics the resulting placidity and keeps to its composed structure. Its predictable form powerfully renders the uncomfortable stasis of this landscape. Indeed, by mirroring the final lines with the first – "The tombs of landscape windmills / are broken empty towers" – the poem gestures back to its beginning, barely making any discursive movement (22). The circular

modulation of the poem imitates the windless and static landscape; yet, the cyclical turn concomitantly suggests the continuation of a particular modality of wind – enacted by the forgotten movements of the windmill – which asserts the tedium of a repeated or continued past. At a formal level then, the poem both warns of the dangers of disentanglement that, through the figurative lack of wind, makes stagnant the material life of this landscape, while remaining mindful of the difficult histories captured by cyclical modes of movement. Through its content, "Old Slave Villages" demonstrates the ways in which legacies of slavery in the Caribbean remain not only embedded within certain geographies but also implicated within the historical moment of the *Windrush*. The poem sustains the so-called past of slavery and attempts to entwine it into the present of the collection.

This multiform representation of entanglement remains one of the pivotal concerns and complications of *Windrush Songs*. With each lyrical articulation of entanglement, Berry exposes the various nuances of the concept, two of which are especially pertinent to the aims of this chapter. First, within the collection, entanglement serves to confound distinctions between differing histories, temporal periods and geographies. As in "Old Slave Villages," the past becomes continually reinserted into the present of each couplet. The figurative use of entanglement (via the cross-fertilization of varying temporal landscapes) alongside the circuitous structure of the poem, produces a discrepancy (between content and form) that deftly relays the continued relevance and resurgence of the past. The activity of entanglement not only lends itself to the distinctly aeolian sensibilities within Berry's poetry, but also to the central aeolian marker of the collection – the *Windrush*. As a poetic tool that ensnares the past within the present (and even the future), entanglement enables a dialogue concerning the *Windrush* which necessarily

mitigates an understanding of the docking of the ship through divergent historical and geographic contexts. Second, and in relation to these shifting contexts, entanglement aptly captures the interactivity that shapes the collection's attempt to render convivial encounters. If we understand the dynamics of conviviality as one that registers the precarious, contingent and potentially destructive aspects of an encounter, then the concept of entanglement invites further exploration into the contours of what we might call "failed" instances of "coming together." Entanglement offers conviviality a representational tactic within *Windrush Songs* that alerts us to the unexpected encounters provoked by the voyage of the *Windrush*, which ensnare (often uncomfortably) disparate histories, geographies and contexts. In what follows, I read the poem "Beginning in a City, 1948" as a means to explore one of the more complex inflections of entanglement in the collection. By examining the poem through the lens of a convivial encounter, I attempt to recalibrate dominating interpretive practices which consistently elide the convivial dynamics embedded within representations of Windrush migrants. An attention to the ways in which the *Windrush* initiated a convivial "coming together" (instead of a simply inhospitable confrontation), enables a more variegated understanding of the difficulties that constituted the sign of 1948.

"Beginning in a City, 1948," consolidates the historical sign of the *Windrush* by detailing a seemingly emblematic first-person account of a migrant's arrival in London. Echoing the title of the poem, the speaker begins by delineating a buoyant sense of a new start: "Stirred by restlessness, pushed by history, / I found myself in the centre of Empire" (78). While this four-lined stanza lilts toward a modulated rhythm shaped by the optimistic naivety of the speaker, the poem's structure disintegrates into free verse after these first few lines, as the speaker soon realizes "I

knew no room. / I knew no Londoner. / I searched without knowing" (78). Walking through London like "a half-finished shack in the cold winds," the speaker finds what appears to be a reasonable place-to-let (78). Yet, upon waking up "stiff" and "frosty" in the morning, he is attacked by "[a] rage of combined smells" (78); as he finally meets the other occupants, he is revolted to discover that this is a dosshouse with "[o]ne-legged" and "bandaged" people "prodding sizzled bacon and kippers" (79). Recognizing the mistake, he quickly collects his down payment and leaves. While walking along Coldharbour Lane, he stops by a "queue of men – some black" waiting at the Labour Exchange; here, on encountering a fellow migrant, the speaker is finally directed towards a more suitable place of lodging. After this fortuitous exchange, he decisively tells us: "So, I had begun – begun in London" (79). Importantly however, there are two distinct "beginnings" in this poem that mark two very different kinds of encounter. The first "beginning," in the dosshouse, is rendered as a "false" start where the speaker confronts the destitution of postwar London through "English" food and impoverished, presumably "white," "English" faces. The second "beginning," at the queue of men, activates the "real" start where the speaker is brought together with other ostensibly Caribbean migrants within what would soon become the iconic migrant space of Brixton.

If we take the speaker at his word and read the second "beginning" as his "real" (i.e. successful) start in London, we are faced with what seems to be a rather well rehearsed narrative of a Windrush migrant's experience. The speaker's "first" (unsuccessful) encounter with London reveals the city as an unwelcoming and inhospitable place, figured like "a dream" through its "frosty field[s]" (78). This poetic account of London recalls Sam Selvon's oft-cited paradigmatic "Windrush" text *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), where in the opening scene of the novel, the

narrator describes the setting as a "grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unreality about London … as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet" (1). The narrator not only depicts the city's geography as estranging and lonely, but also fundamentally inaccessible: London constitutes an intangible outer-planetary space that remains elusive to the protagonist of the novel. Both Selvon's narrator and the speaker of Berry's poem tellingly draw upon the chimeric qualities of the city as a means to articulate the ways its migrants exist almost exclusively on the margins of metropolitan life. The "unreal" "dream" that London comes to encapsulate, grants the city an aloof character that leaves the migrants jilted. The only sense of "coming together" either narrator/speaker appears to offer is fostered through other (predominantly male) migrant or black communities.

I am consciously resourcing what is now a near-clichéd comparison with Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* in an attempt to register a certain prevailing legacy of representing (and reading) the marginality of the Windrush migrant. The immediate similarities that I have drawn out between these two texts – the ways they deploy like images, capture the story-telling qualities of their narratives, and render the desolation of London life for a migrant – obscures each of their unique enunciations of the Windrush moment (their publication dates, for one, stand at least fifty years apart). In making this comparison however, I want to demonstrate the easy homogenizing tendencies available when reading literature concerned with the *Windrush*. Many of the recognizable texts of the Windrush moment – whether Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), or Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960) – delineate what Donald Hinds in 1966 appropriately termed the various journeys to an illusion. These creative narratives powerfully figure a multitude of stories wrought from the

inhospitable encounters experienced by the Windrush migrants who clearly occupied a less than equal position in postwar British society. As E.R. Braithwaite has recently reminded us in the foreword to Onyekachi Wambu's collection *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain*, these writers "wrote of the British society as they found it, distressingly alien, yet painfully familiar, and, in writing, held an unwelcome mirror to Britain's reluctant gaze" (17).

While it not my intention to dilute the important political and social commentaries offered by these texts, I do want to suggest that in focusing on the "distressingly alien" and exclusionary aspects of postwar British life there has been a insistent rendering of the Windrush migrant as the quintessential outsider, or subaltern figure, that bears almost no affiliation to those outside their "own" communities. This mode of representation has become more than just a trope within the literature that allows us to identify similarities between texts. The understanding of the excluded nature of the Windrush migrant has become, to my mind, the dominating lens through which we read or categorize Windrush texts.

Consider, for instance, the way in which "Beginning in a City, 1948" has been anthologized in Mark Ford's *London: A History in Verse* (2012). Ford's impressive text, featuring a selection of poetry "from Chaucer to Wordsworth to the present day," is endorsed as "the most capacious and wide-ranging anthology of poems about London to date" (backcover). Ford includes two of Berry's poems in his collection – "Two Black Labourers on a London Building Site" (1985) and "Beginning in a City, 1948" (2007). Alongside the work of Berry, Ford incorporates poems by Grace Nichols and Linton Kwesi Johnson "that reveal in unsparing detail the difficulties to be overcome by some of those lured to London from Commonwealth countries in the postwar era" (Ford 13). These poets are drawn upon

in Ford's collection as a means to evidence the unwelcoming nature of this specific "phase of immigration inaugurated by the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*" (13).

Yet, in grouping these poets together (who each arrived in London in different decades), Ford seamlessly conflates their work under the sign of the *Windrush*. Within the collection's introduction, he reads Berry's "Two Black Labourers on a London Building Site" alongside Linton Kwesi Johnson's "Sonny's Lettah" to mark the "mistrust and suspicion with which these new arrivals to London were greeted" (13). Neither poem, however, explicitly comments upon the *Windrush*: Johnson's "Sonny's Lettah," an anti-sus poem first released in 1979, remains distinctly *not of* the Windrush moment. It is the ease with which Ford connects these disconnected poems that reflects the troubling ways in which the Windrush migrant has been both read and represented. Caribbean or black British poets are mobilized here almost singularly to demonstrate the "unsparing detail" of their exclusion from London, which originates within the historical sign of 1948. The interpretive frame offered by Ford's collection remains incapable of charting any poetic form of postwar migrant experience that does not render the migrant as anything other than a lonely Londoner. Berry's work, alongside that of Nichols and Johnson, is assembled as a means to capture iterations of the always already subaltern position of Windrush migrants.

Such a framing problematically decontextualizes the condition of the migrant by suggesting a consistent and uniform legacy of representation. In situating the poetry of Berry, Nichols and Johnson within the confines of a single historical moment, Ford ends up paradoxically dehistoricizing the nuances within their work. This singular (and solitary) sense of the Windrush migrant critically risks effacing the provocative connections and affiliations garnered within the work of these poets.

In Berry's "Beginning in a City, 1948," such an interpretive perspective would make incommensurable any productive association between the speaker of the poem and the "[o]ne-legged" "bandaged" people of the dosshouse (Berry, *Windrush* 79). Yet, this is precisely what Berry's poetry suggests. By offering two "beginnings" in the poem, Berry opens up divergent avenues for reading that enable us to move beyond the migrant's desolation and marginality. His characteristic "bridge-building" tactics intertwine the plight of the impoverished occupants with that of the Windrush migrant. This entangling process, which marks the crux of the convivial encounter in the poem, initiates a complicated conception of 1948 London that begins to question the centrality of the migrant figure.

The complexities portrayed in "Beginning in a City, 1948" are notably enunciated through its free verse format. While the verses appear to have a near-arbitrary and non-existent rhythm or structure, the poem's form is best understood when compared to its initial articulation in prose. In Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan's collection of essays *Voices of the Crossing* (2000), Berry writes an autobiographical account of his life, from his childhood in Fair Prospect, Jamaica to the moment he was called for an OBE in 1990. In his essay, Berry details his own arrival in London, in the winter of 1948, which remains, in many ways, indistinguishable from his poem "Beginning in a City, 1948." It is worth quoting the relevant passage at length:

> I arrived at Victoria Station in early November in misty chilly weather of early night. With no address to go to, I approached three policemen separately, before I found a place with a vacancy: a Rowton House. They had rooms at two shillings and sixpence a night. Relieved, I booked in for four nights. The room was sparse and cold, with only one army blanket on the bed. Next morning the place

amazed me. I came downstairs and the place stank of unwashed bodies mixed with the smells of kippers being grilled and sausages fried. I came closer and saw an incredible group of people – some with sores bandages, other with sticks and crutches, others dirty and beggar-dressed – having breakfast, making it in a vast open room with ranges of hot-surface cookers, or simply sitting about. The shocking people looked like the flocked grouping of the city's down-and-outs. Saying to myself, 'Surely, this is not the London I have come to,' I nippily tripped out, collected back my seven shillings and sixpence down-payment for three more nights, collected my suitcase from the left-luggage place and started walking, looking for any room-to-let adverts. (Berry, "Ancestors I Carry" 154)

The similarity between this passage and Berry's poem is significant. Like his essay, Berry's poem also marks the number of nights he stayed (and booked) at the dosshouse, the cold room with the army blanket, the details of the food fried in the morning, the condition of the occupants, the exact cost of the room, alongside his abrupt departure. Even the dialogue between Berry and the men at the Labour Exchange remains nearly identical. In this prosaic version of events, the minutia of Berry's first encounter with London is made slightly more intelligible: we know exactly where Berry stays his first night (in a hostel chain rather than a dosshouse) and the "one-legged" "bandaged" people end up becoming the "dirty and beggar-dressed … the city's down-and-outs." This first encounter in London remains distinctly unwelcoming, but without the devastating impact rendered from its poetic version. While Berry is clearly shaken by the level of destitution in the hostel, the casual tone of the narrative shapes this encounter as an episode, amongst many, that has punctuated his life in Britain.

By dwelling on this specific moment in the poem, Berry grants his first encounter an amplified lyrical significance. Although "Beginning in a City, 1948" maintains a prosaic structure – instead of rhythmic stanzas, for instance, Berry gives us verses organized as if they were paragraphs – its poetic shape and inconsistent verses offer a representational intensity that allows a closer reading of this crucial convivial encounter. Observe how Berry's first night at the hostel translates into poetic form, from "The room was sparse and cold, with only one army blanket on the bed," to:

> I was left in a close-walled room,
> left with a dying shadeless bulb,
> a pillowless bed and a smelly army blanket –
> all the comfort I had paid for. (*Windrush* 78)

The paratactic qualities of the poetic version, which severs the transitions between each line, provokes an emphasis on the materiality of the room – its "close-walled," "shadeless," and "smelly" features. By slowing down what would have been the easy rhythm of the narrative, Berry makes us dwell with him in this room. The fluidity of the prosaic form becomes effectively stalled in the poetry. Like "Wind-rush," the hampering of the rhythm here reflects a disappointment and lack of climax.

The use of parataxis in Berry's poem not only mediates its tempo, but also informs the ways in which it figuratively captures the ensnaring activity of entanglement. In dismantling the use of connecting words, transitions or conjunctions, Berry breaks off the end of each line, leaving it both disconnected and vulnerably open. Such a representational strategy heightens the imagistic effect of

each line while concomitantly inviting manifold associations. We see this most lucidly in the depiction of London's "down-and-outs":

> One-legged people stood around a wall of hot plates
> prodding sizzled bacon and kippers.
> Sore-legged and bandage people poured tea.
> Weather-cracked faces, hairy and hairless, were chewing.
> No woman smiled. No man chuckled.
> Words pressed through gums and gaps of rusty teeth. (79)

In prose form, we are told that these "[s]ore-legged and bandaged people" are impoverished and beggarly. Berry does not explain their circumstances or the possible significance of why he finds himself in the same hostel. In poetic form however, this reference to the city's "down-and-outs" is rendered more vividly and with greater detail. In Berry's poem, they become more than just a "group of people" – they transform into "fellow-inmates in a crowded room" (78). An affiliation emerges between the speaker (migrant) in the poem and the occupants of the dosshouse, even if this precarious connection remains uninvited, even rejected. The seemingly disjointed adjectives that constitute the features of the occupants – "[o]ne-legged," "[s]ore-legged," "bandaged," and "[w]eather-cracked" – lyrically evidence a complicated depiction of a 1948 London hostel. This truncated catalogue of features captures a distinctly postwar scene of destitute characters: the elderly, working classes and ostensible war veterans. Historically, a hostel such as Rowton House would have provided "transit accommodation for evacuees" during the Second World War, and also refugees from Poland and Belgium; the buildings themselves were "also used as air-raid shelters and to house occasional parties of troops" (Higginbotham). By depicting the occupants of the hostel in this referential

way – that is, through their lack of limbs, damaged bodies, and worn down frames – Berry embeds them within the context of 1948 and thus paratactically entangles the Windrush migrant's predicament within the embodied material realities of postwar London.

The speaker's first encounter in London becomes then not only an intercultural confrontation (with "English" food and possibly "white" "English" faces), but also an intersocial one that discombobulates the expectations of the migrant. In confining the "fellow-inmates" (including the migrant) to paralleled circumstances within 1948 London, the poem exposes their vulnerable and peripheral positions. Importantly however, this intercultural interaction refuses to yield an edifying or restorative cosmopolitanism; the migrant in the poem cultivates no new awareness or sense of connection with the occupants of the dosshouse. Rather, such an entanglement of bodily circumstances enunciates the unexpected and precarious dynamics of conviviality. As Jasbir Puar reminds us, because conviviality is fundamentally an "attribute and function of assembling," it "does not lead to a politics of the universal or inclusive common, nor an ethics of individuatedness"; instead, conviviality provokes, as quoted earlier, "the futurity enabled through the open materiality of bodies as a Place to Meet" (168). When bodies "come together" and "dissipate" through their "intensifications and vulnerabilities," they "insistently render bare" their own instabilities (168). These kinds of encounters, Puar suggests, "are rarely comfortable mergers" as they work to uncover the body as always already in relation, rather than "pre-formed before the encounter" (168). The speaker's "failed" first encounter demonstrates how figurative tactics of entanglement set up a convivial encounter which poetically enables an unexpected but powerful moment of merger, or "coming together." Through the forced lyrical dwelling in the dosshouse,

Berry constructs a distinctly un-generative yet suggestively complicated encounter, full of implication, that might have been missed had we exclusively focused on the solitary condition of the migrant. This attention to the translocations and material realities that interlace the historical sign of 1948 offers an account of the *Windrush* that poetically highlights the precariousness of convivial encounters and the entangled interactions it necessarily provokes.

By formally demonstrating the ways in which conviviality enunciates itself through the activity of entanglement, Berry's "Beginning in a City, 1948" reveals yet another iteration of the collection's aeolian poetics. The paratactic structure of the poem, which mimics, to some extent, the stalled fluidity and anti-climactic rhythmic motility of "Wind-rush," elicits unexpected convivial encounters that dwell upon uncomfortable moments of uncertainty. Berry's figurative use of a poetics of wind thematizes a distinctive aesthetic in the collection that attempts to complicate any kind of predictable movement we might associate with the *Windrush*. By lyrically enunciating the inoperative qualities of conviviality, Berry refigures the concept of "coming together" as an act that might be more difficult and complicated than originally anticipated. Through the multiplicity of voices within the collection, Berry attempts to offer what Markham's poem "On George Lamming's Couch" so poignantly demonstrated: "new frames of reference, new contexts" for rethinking "both sides of the "encounter[s]" that have shaped the Windrush moment ("Root and Roots" 22). Such a poetics not only opens up novel interpretive frames through which to read 1948, but also alerts us to the limits of interpretation whereby the abrupt break of a poetic line leaves us to ponder the implication of links and connections never made.

Reading Beginnings: The Revelatory Cosmopolitanism of Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

> The world never stops beginning.
>
> – Jean-Francois Lyotard ("Newman: The Instant" 82)

If Berry's collection forges a belated revisiting of what was once the immediacy of 1948, then Andrea Levy's *Small Island* makes immediate a more distant reimagining of that moment. Born in 1956 London to Jamaican parents, Levy (who has Jamaican, Scottish and Jewish ancestry) is of the so-called second generation of black British writers: Berry was one ship removed from the *Windrush*; Levy is one generation. It was her father who made the iconic journey from Jamaica to England on the *Empire Windrush*, unaware, as Levy puts it, "that he was making history" ("This is my England"). The historical tenor of the Windrush moment has thus profoundly influenced Levy's earlier novels – *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996), and *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) – which explore the cultural legacies of those migrants, particularly the second generation, whose lives were constellated by the arrival of the ex-troopship. Set respectively in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and often credited as a trilogy, Levy's first texts make legible the predicaments of identity, race, and unbelonging within the context of growing up black and British in late twentieth-century England. A recognizable millennial shift has shaped Levy's writing however, as her work has become more overtly preoccupied with the contours of history and the ways in which the past provocatively composes the present. Her writing in the twenty-first century has, so far, gravitated towards the challenge of representing history – see for instance her 2010 slavery novel *The Long Song* – in ways that foreground the aesthetic tactics necessary for such a creative rendering. Levy's millennial writing remains as

concerned with the implications of history as it is with the narratological difficulties of relaying its immediacy.

Small Island, Levy's inaugural twenty-first-century novel, attempts to capture the conjuncture of 1948 (much like Berry's *Windrush Songs*) as an insistently irreducible moment moulded through a convergence of discrepant histories and geographies. Located in England, Jamaica, pre-partition India and pre-independent Burma, the novel assembles the dispersed stories of its four protagonists: Hortense and Gilbert, a black Jamaican couple, and Queenie and Bernard, a white English couple. By interlacing the first-person narratives of each of her characters, Levy offers a polyphonic account of 1948 that entangles the manifold consequences of empire, war and migration with – what appears to be – the contingent coming together of these two couples. The novel structurally separates the narratives into three intertwining time periods – the "Prologue" (1924), "Before" (pre-1948) and "1948." As the text oscillates between "Before" and "1948," we find Bernard at War on the Indian front, Queenie struggling through a hidden pregnancy in postwar London, and Hortense and Gilbert (Queenie's lodgers) facing their own uniquely unwelcomed arrivals to the "Motherland." By paratactically entwining the backgrounds of each character ("Before") within the novel's present ("1948"), Levy constitutes the year 1948 as a nexus of cross-cultural encounters which culminate in the climactic bringing together of all the characters in Queenie's lodging house. The space of the house (Bernard's relinquished family home taken over by Queenie who thought him dead after the War) forges an uncomfortable merger between the couples – a Place to Meet where the complications of living together in postwar London become unavoidably apparent. The brutally intimate concluding scene of the novel, which sees Queenie giving up her mixed-raced baby to Hortense and Gilbert

(a child unknown to Hortense as her second cousin, once removed) marks an unexpected moment where the vulnerabilities (and prejudices) of Levy's protagonists become unpredictably exposed.

Through its temporal disruptions and geographic dislocations, the novel not only intertwines the fates of its characters, but also, counter-intuitively, shapes an alternative account of the arrival of the *Windrush*. Many critics have fixated on this point by enthusiastically lauding the representation of the *Windrush* in the text as one that "contests" the mythology surrounding the docking of the ex-troopship (Carroll 68); because "Levy structures her work by dividing chapters by character name as well as by shifting temporal perspectives" she effectively "destabilise[s] the single trajectory of any of the narratives" (Courtman 99). As Alicia E. Ellis contends, "Levy complicates our understanding of the Windrush era as a turning point in British cultural history by calling attention to [its] … pre-history" (72). Indeed, the structural and thematic focus on the "Before" of 1948 serves, in many ways, to efface the centrality and dominating instance of arrival often attributed to the *Windrush* voyage. Unlike other contemporaneous "Windrush" texts which spotlight the oceanic journeys of its postwar migrants – namely, Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* (1985), Alex Wheatle's *Island Songs* (2005) or even James Berry's *Windrush Songs* (2007) – Levy's novel entirely avoids depicting the ship. Instead, the *Windrush* is mentioned by name only twice (*Small Island* 99; 214), persuasively rendering its sparse articulation a sign of an incidental event. Stripped of its sublime quality, the berthing of the ship transforms into more of a contingent landing than an epochal beginning.

While Eva Ulrike Pirker contends that Levy's scant attention to the ship evidences the ways in which "more detail" is given "to the *period* of arrival than the

moment," I argue – with Berry's "Beginning in a City, 1948" in mind – that the novel overtly retains the representational value of the momentary (*Narrative Projections* 172). Against much critical consensus, I suggest that Levy crucially preserves the notion of a beginning within her narrative in ways that narratologically spurs a distinctly revelatory cosmopolitanism. In deemphasizing the *Windrush* as a central instance of arrival, *Small Island* constructs the temporal markers of its narrative ("Prologue," "Before," "1948") as sites or moments of multiple arrivals. It is not that the novel rejects the arrival of the *Windrush* as a beginning, but instead refigures it as a sign that registers the iteration of many beginnings.

In venturing to interpret the gravity of the momentary in Levy's text, I want to turn to Lyotard's articulation of the "(paradoxical) idea of *beginning*," which captures, to my mind, the counter-intuitive way in which Levy resources beginnings within the novel ("Newman: The Instant" 82). Through the work of avant-garde American artist Barnett Newman, Lyotard identifies a specific anti-hermeneutical process that attempts to "read" the so-called lack of subject matter in Newman's abstract expressionism. For Lyotard, Newman's paintings should be understood through the antinomies that constitute the event of a beginning. What renders a beginning paradoxical for Lyotard is that it "takes place in the world as its initial difference, as the beginning of its history. It does not belong to this world because it begets it, it falls from a prehistory, or from an a-history"; yet, at the same time, because of its occurrence, the instant in which it "happens," a beginning also "takes its place in the network of what has happened": "[t]he world never stops beginning" (82). For Lyotard, the immediacy, or instance, of the beginning becomes the subject matter itself ("a line on an empty surface"), one that captures a rejection of existing structures of knowledge and modes of interpretation (82). The significance in

maintaining, to adapt Lyotard's terminology, the "eventness" of the *Windrush* – its enunciation as a moment rather than a period – lies precisely, then, in recognizing its potential to break, fracture or entangle history (the "Before" of the narrative). Reading the arrival of the *Windrush* as a beginning, or as a multiplicity of beginnings, less reifies its mythology than suggests a critical platform from which to insistently re-interpret it as an event. *Small Island*, I argue, offers us manifold beginnings that dramatize the radical capability of a moment to reshape and restart the narrative.

The novel's preoccupation with what I want to call "tropes of beginning" importantly constitutes its narratological composition in ways that guide the reader's interpretive process. We begin the novel with Queenie's prologue, set in 1924 during the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. While the prologue introduces us to a young Queenie, and sets up many of the central themes of the text, its position at the start of the novel remains consistently undermined as the story unfolds. Because four different characters narrate *Small Island*, we are confronted with four uniquely different beginnings. Each character introduces the novel in divergent ways: Hortense depicts her unsettling arrival in 1948 London, Gilbert responds to the reprimands of his unsatisfied wife, and Bernard describes his deployment to Bombay during the War. None of these beginnings recount the actual start of each character's story – they instead relay the first instance in which the reader comes to encounter them in the narrative. These differing enunciations of a beginning work to impel associative connections for the reader who is encouraged to make cohesive the discrepant stories. Disjointed from a linear timeline, these beginnings coalesce to offer four separate moments which entangle the "Prologue" (1924) and the War ("Before") with the novel's present ("1948"). By articulating the beginning of each

character's narrative in this dislocating way, Levy provokes a comparative exercise that correlates the imperious shaping of Britishness, which we see in Queenie's prologue, with Bernard's colonial framing of the Second World War alongside Hortense and Gilbert's disappointing arrivals in England. The resulting tacit connections made between Empire, War and migration serve to persistently re-calibrate each narrative (or beginning) in paralleled relation to the others. Structurally speaking then, through the assemblage of these four stories, the narrative repeatedly begins in differing and intertwining ways, anew.

The consequence of these iterative beginnings remain in the novel's refusal to privilege any single moment (the prologue, the War, or the docking of the *Windrush*) while concomitantly resourcing the epochal weight of such moments. Levy attempts to retain the destabilizing repercussions of each of the multiple beginnings, which, at the same time, are continually overlaid upon other beginnings in ways that undercut their singular articulation. This is where Lyotard's conception of a beginning becomes useful. His paradoxical enunciation of the concept, which depicts it as both out-of-time in its creation of a new order yet also (because of its iteration) placed back into time, suggests that beginnings continually slip from their fundamentally dislocated position. It is this slippage (the central paradox) that Levy is concerned with: beginnings carry the potential in the novel to displace what came "before" or simply slip back into its place. The criticality of the beginning, specifically its immediacy, remains for Lyotard in its unintelligible and contingent representation, where interpretation is both questioned and "held back" – the viewer responds without the inclination to decipher or comprehend ("Newman: The Instant" 83). This interpretive impasse, offered by Newman's paintings, becomes inverted within Levy's writing. Through the interlacing of the stories and subsequent parallels

drawn between the characters, the immediacy of each new start loses its seeming contingency. Beginnings function in the text to provoke an interpretive *amplification* on the part of the reader who is encouraged to connect, uncover and actively decipher the tangled stories.

While Lyotard's notion of a beginning locates a specifically unintelligible postmodern aesthetic that refuses interpretation, Levy's creative rendering of the idea contradicts this hermeneutical resistance. Through its multiple beginnings and intertwining narratives, *Small Island* overtly exhibits and makes intelligible the connections between the four stories, provoking a surplus of interpretation for the reader: the novel becomes a hermeneutic site of revelation and transformation as opposed to an inoperative impasse (of the kind we saw with Berry's aeolian poetry). By overworking the connections between the narratives, I want to suggest that Levy, in the end, exempts the reader from the complications within each story. The reader is thus enabled to put together the "meta-narrative" of the novel in ways that begin to nullify the disruptive effect of the discrepant story lines. In what follows, I turn to an instance in *Small Island* which exposes this privileged positioning of the reader. Through an examination of Levy's narratological investment in beginnings, I argue that we can distinguish the articulation of a revelatory cosmopolitanism that problematically dispenses with the difficulties embedded within the novel's fraught convivial encounters. Through the edifying qualities of Levy's writing, only the reader can cultivate a suitably worldly perspective that has the ability to bring together the disparate narratives. At the expense of the characters, the reader is meant to develop what the novel projects as its progressive cosmopolitan sensibility.

Near the end of the novel, before Queenie exposes her affair with Michael (a Jamaican Royal Air Force pilot) to Bernard, she warns us of the destabilizing effect of her admission. The start of her chapter begins with these lines:

> There are some words that once spoken will split the world in two. There would be the life before you breathed them and then the altered life after they'd been said. They take a long time to find, words like that. They make you hesitate. Choose with care. Hold on to them unspoken for as long as you can just so your world will stay intact. (Levy, *Small Island* 491)

This narrative act constructs what Queenie's deems to be a radically new beginning: her disclosure, which uncovers the identity of her child's father to both Bernard and the reader, is framed in terms of an epochal shift within the narrative and the lives of the characters. After this testimony, Queenie imagines her words will beget a new world completely dislocated from what came before. Her chapter articulates for the reader what would seem to be a decisive break in the narrative. If there are multiple beginnings in *Small Island*, then this explicit enunciation of a new start marks the crux of those beginnings. Michael – who is not only the child's father but also Hortense's second cousin – is figured in this chapter as the novel's hinge, since he bridges and conjoins the lives of the two couples and their intertwining fates. It is here that Queenie reveals what happens to Michael, the silent fifth protagonist of the text. Shot down in France and rescued by local farmers, he eventually returns to London to see Queenie before leaving for a new life in Canada. Although Queenie attempts to abort their "illegitimate child" (also named Michael), her choice to keep the baby unveils the central revelation of the chapter (496). Because the novel presents this moment as a beginning – a splitting of the world – it alerts us to the

paradigm shifting consequences of Queenie's decision to raise (on her own) their "illegitimate" mixed-raced baby.

While this chapter indeed enunciates a fateful new beginning (with Bernard's arrival, Queenie knows she can no longer keep her child), it less breaks off from the "pre-history" of the rest of the narrative as Queenie suggests, than articulates the extent to which the lives of the novel's characters remain intimately entangled. At a hermeneutic level, Queenie's "world-splitting" admission uncovers the ensnaring connections and parallels that covertly resurface throughout each character's narrative. We are reminded in this chapter, for instance, that Queenie has already seen Hortense before 1948. Returning Michael's lost wallet, she recalls the one photograph he carries with him "of the old coloured gentleman and his seated wife. And that little girl" (493). The "little girl," a young Hortense, stands out of the picture both as an interpretive hint for the reader and a moment of conspicuous recognition for Queenie. Recollecting her impression of the photograph, Queenie spotlights the "little girl" by placing her alone within a single sentence. The truncated description of young Hortense is suggestive of a narrative pause: the "little girl" captures Queenie's attention. Unlike her previous description of the photo in the "Before" section of the novel, where Queenie draws no special attention (grammatical or otherwise) to the "little darkie girl with fuzzy-wuzzy hair tied in ribbons as big as bandages," this specific articulation (in 1948) is rendered in subtly affectionate terms. The second account of the photograph, which is significantly less derogatory, marks the developing and intimate relationship between these two women. Hortense has just delivered Queenie's baby, and will become, by the end of the novel the child's adoptive mother. The slight pause and moment of recognition

established in Queenie's memory of the photograph becomes, then, a quietly suggestive connection between the two women.

Through such instances of entanglement, the text persistently attempts to cultivate a certain interpretive awareness in its readers. By braiding together narrative clues that relate and conjoin various part of the story, *Small Island* consciously ventures to develop a readerly susceptibility to the interlacing connections between the different life worlds of the characters. If we return to Queenie's "epoch-making" chapter, we find other textual examples of entanglement, which both reify the "eventness" of Queenie's admission while bearing witness to the ways in which the revelations in the text remain plotted within the historical timeline of the novel.

As Queenie recounts her affair with Michael, she reminds us of his painful memories of the 1944 Jamaican hurricane. In the novel's "Before" section, Hortense originally depicts the destruction of the hurricane, which marked the moment of Michael's departure from her life. During the storm, we learn that Michael has developed a relationship with Mrs Ryder, a white American evangelist who has set up a local private school with her husband. As the hurricane batters the school where Hortense, Michael and Mrs Ryder are seeking refuge, Hortense notices that Michael "put his hand over Mrs Ryder's, slipping his fingers delicately through hers" (54). This "ungodly embrace" exposes the ensnaring, yet destructive, qualities of entanglement that the hurricane comes to represent, as Michael's affair with Mrs Ryder, provoking derision from the community, forces him to leave unexpectedly to England (57). With the brutal death of Mr Ryder – whose spine becomes "twisted and broken" around the base of a tree – the storm stands for a tragic event through which Hortense's family falls apart (56). In Queenie's narrative however, the citation

of the hurricane signals the coming together of a new family. As Michael tells Queenie that he lost his family in the hurricane (subtly revising Hortense's version of events) he recreates the moment in the schoolhouse, transforming Queenie into Mrs Ryder's surrogate: asking her if she "ever felt the force of a hurricane," Michael, "[o]ne by one … slipped his fingers between [Queenie's] … forcing them apart while gently increasing his squeeze" (494). The explicit iteration of the schoolhouse scene here, where Michael "gently" intertwines his hands with Queenie's (almost exactly as he did with Mrs Ryder), evidences the ways in which Levy leads her readers to make key associations between disparate moments in the text. These epochal instances in the novel – the hurricane, Queenie's admission – come to radically reshape the narrative not in their transformation of one singular narrative, but rather in their entanglement with other narratives. While Queenie articulates her admission as a moment that breaks away from the rest of the stories, it rather serves to demonstrate the extent to which her chapter remains deeply connected to them.

It is difficult to read any section of *Small Island* without detecting these associative clues. Paralleled scenes and proxy encounters shape the novel's constitution working to intertwine and commensurate each of the four stories. If the motility of entanglement registers the unexpected indeterminacies of a convivial encounter in Berry's poetry, then in Levy's writing, such activity becomes more of a narratological strategy that guides the interpretive impulses embedded within the novel's design. Entanglement only occurs in the text when readers recognize the cues from which to discern the interconnections between the narratives. Instead of signalling the uncertainties of conviviality, the hermeneutic process provoked by *Small Island* cultivates revelatory moments for the reader who narratologically brings together "diverse groups into the same present" (Gilroy, *After Empire* 74).

Where Berry's paratactic poetry left transitions between each line disconnected and, at times, inoperative, Levy's paratactically structured novel conjoins its seemingly separated narratives. In explicitly providing the connectives between the disparate stories, *Small Island* accentuates its scrupulous narrative construction: each cue becomes an interpretive prompt that seeks to amplify readerly revelation.

This self-conscious configuration of the novel provokes a reinterpretation of the opening lines of Queenie's admission chapter, which suggests a telling metafictional commentary on the text. If we read Levy as Queenie's proxy writer, then these first few lines disclose key elements of the novel's *modus operandi*. Within these lines, the book presents itself as a new beginning – a critical conjuncture that seeks to radically question the reader's perspective. The "words" that "split the world in two" not only reflexively turn toward the words on the page, but the novel as a whole; the "hesitat[ion]" and "care" taken with these words spotlight the meticulous construction and labour behind the assembling of these four narratives. The passage suggests that words have the ability to fundamentally "alte[r]" lives: they instigate paradigm-shifting moments garnered through a methodical consideration of narrative (Levy, *Small Island* 491). Writing becomes delineated as a process of revelation and exposure ("once spoken," or written, words can "split the world"), while the activity of reading (or listening, in the context of the chapter) lends itself to a conceivably transformative or edifying experience.

The resulting interactivity developed between the reader and the text lays bare a uniquely didactic composition that captures key aspects of the novel's immense success and subsequent designated cultural value. While Berry's *Windrush Songs* has yet to received any significant attention (critical or otherwise), Levy's *Small Island* has become one of the most acclaimed contemporary black British

novels, winning the Orange Prize for Fiction, the Orange Best of the Best prize, the Whitbread Novel Award, the Whitbread Book of the Year and the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Alongside its 2009 BBC adaptation, the novel has been the subject of numerous studies, the most recent of which includes the first book-length edited collection of Levy's entire oeuvre (Baxter and James 2014). While Levy's growing critical clout garnered through the success of *Small Island* remains significant, I want to specifically examine the novel's role in the largest ever mass-reading project to take place in Britain – an event that explicitly (and powerfully) demonstrates the didactic impulses of the text. The initiative, *Small Island Read 2007*, which disseminated over 50,000 free copies of the text around the UK, not only reiterates the distinctly edifying qualities of Levy's writing, but also imbues the text with ethical and civic value. Through this nationally framed collective reading event, *Small Island* became marked (and marketed) as a useful and beneficial text for readers. By resourcing the novel's self-conscious interaction with its reader, the initiative, in many ways, sought to exploit the potentially transformative effects of the narrative.

Bringing together previous annual reading projects, *Small Island Read* aligned itself with the 2007 bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade.[8] On the project's home webpage, we learn that it is primarily interested in "exploring slavery's continuing influence upon multicultural Britain":

> The novel *Small Island* was chosen not only because it is an entertaining and enjoyable read but also because it provides an insight into the initial post-war contact between Jamaican migrants, descendants of enslaved Africans, and the white 'Mother Country'. ("Home")

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[8] The reading projects that contributed to *Small Island Read* included *The Great Reading Adventure* (Bristol and the South West) and *Liverpool Reads*.

Since the project positions itself as an examination of the legacies of slavery, the decision to deploy Levy's text appears, at first, rather peculiar. *Small Island* is not a novel about slavery, and its uptake in commemorating the Slave Trade Abolition Bill reflects a ostensibly problematic screening of the brutalities of slavery. In the context of the bicentenary, the text comes to stand as a comfortable proxy for the history of slavery in ways that shift emphasis on to more salutary and "enjoyable" narratives of a "multicultural Britain." While the 2007 commemoration inspires *Small Island Reads*, the subject of slavery is clearly not its main concern. Instead, the aims of the project centre upon the activity of reading: through *Small Island*, the initiative ventured to "bring diverse communities together through the act of reading and thereby foster a shared sense of identity" (Kelly 5). The novel was essentially resourced to facilitate a community-making exercise energized by the dramatized encounter between black Jamaican migrants and the so-called white Mother Country. Because *Small Island* enables readers to occupy multiple perspectives, at a structural and thematic level, it became an apt choice for an initiative looking to mimic the multiplicity of interactions fostered through the reading of the text.

Yet, it was not just the novel's narrative structure nor Levy's "entertaining" writing that made *Small Island* amenable for the reading project. Its central focus on 1948 – the year which spotlighted "initial post-war contact[s]" – also contributed to what I deem to be the rhetorical cosmopolitan shaping of the initiative. Eschewing the multiple beginnings the novel sets up, the project reads 1948 as a singular sign for the docking of the *Windrush*. The initiative reframes the focus of the novel as a means to disseminate an easy, accessible and streamlined account of the story. Witness, for instance, the synopsis of *Small Island* provided on the project's website:

The reader is immersed in the period when the first black Caribbean immigrants arrived in post-war Britain and made contact with the white resident population, a meeting that would change the lives of all. The story shifts between 1948, the year when the ss (sic) *Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury in Kent carrying 492 Jamaican migrant workers – including among them Andrea Levy's father – and 'Before', the years leading up to this significant moment in British history. The events are seen through the eyes of four narrators, two black and two white. ("*Small Island*")

This summary reduces the novel's 1948 to an historical moment exclusively shaped by the arrival of the *Windrush*, an event marking the so-called "first" encounter between "black Caribbean immigrants" and the "white resident population." Here, we find yet another example of the *Windrush* myth "as a revolutionary rupture in a national identity imagined as homogenous" (Mead 137). While *Small Island* avoids depicting the landing of the *Windrush* in such epochal terms (the event, as previously mentioned, is barely cited in the text), or as a moment which initiated any kind of "first" encounter (Gilbert has already been to England during the War), the project, on the other hand, reshapes the text by simplifying this variegated account of 1948. Through its inaccurate emphasis on the *Windrush*, the reading project articulates 1948 as a usable past that captures a momentously transformative conjuncture: the reader becomes "immersed" into a narrative that "would change the lives of all," and, by implication, that of the reader's. *Small Island* becomes strategically transfigured into a cosmopolitan opportunity for its audience, one that depends upon the attachments created through a revelatory and transformative reading experience. The novel's metafictional awareness – that "words" can "split the world in two" – converts into the reading project's main objective: to heighten the ethically laudable

relationship between the reader and the text in ways that forge new relationships outside of the literature. The interaction that develops amid the writing and the reading of the novel composes its so-called abiding cultural value.

Critics have contributed in recapitulating the purported critical and ethical worth of *Small Island*. In her examination of the reading responses to *Small Island Read*, Anouk Lang argues that the "straightforward" realism of Levy's novel enables a "freedom of interpretative movement" (132) where readers have the potential to become "challenged and transformed in positive ways by the experience of reading" (137). For David James, the novel's "collaborative realism" calls on the reader to imagine the multifarious perspectives within the text; Levy, James argues, "seems to want us to cultivate … a self-interrogative strain of empathy" (61). Michael Perfect reifies the edifying qualities of the novel in his suggestion that through her contrapuntal writing style, Levy "stresses the importance of openly confronting the past rather than attempting to deny or disregard it" (39). In all of these critical responses to *Small Island*, the novel's perceived hermeneutical goals, which foreground the transformative experience of the reader, become the pivotal frame through which to understand its significance. Because Levy's text is seen to advance an "ethically purposive strategy of instruction," its narrative transforms into a centrally enlightening textual experience (James 61).

This bizarre investment in the edifying import of *Small Island* – the ways in which it "cultivate[s]" "self-interrogative," "challeng[ing]" and "transform[ative]" readerly perspectives – obliges critics to recover, or justify, potentially problematic moments within the novel. Perfect, for instance, explains away the "rather improbable" "coincidence" that the father of Queenie's baby is the same Michael that Hortense has always been in love with, making the adoptive child biologically

linked to both women (39). For Perfect, while "Levy shows … an uncharacteristic disregard for verisimilitude here," she nonetheless succeeds in "emphasiz[ing] the importance of the connection" between the women (39). The questionable, and I would argue conservative, familial relationships set out in the novel, turns into a sacrifice made for the reader, so that he or she can discern the interconnections that the characters fail to realize. This hermeneutical "purposiveness," which spotlights "the inter-weaving of literary leitmotifs, the parallelism and shadowing of situations and characters," shapes the didactic drive of the novel (Woodcock 51). The interpretive ability to decipher connections between narratives, characters and events composes *Small Island* into a text that is consumed by the need to construct narratological links.

These linkages necessarily contribute to the ways in which the novel has been taken up alongside critical theories of conviviality (Woodcock), multiculture (Fuller and Procter), and cosmopolitanism (Brophy). With each of the above critics the purported communal, cross-cultural and inclusive aspects of the text invite cosmopolitan readings that excavate "actually existing" intercultural attachments within both the story itself and the novel's reception. For instance, in their examination of the reading responses gathered through *Small Island Read 2007*, Danielle Fuller and James Procter argue that the cultural reception of *Small Island* performs a version of Gilroy's notion of multiculture, which for them, "describes … spontaneous, precarious, and provisional cross-cultural interactions" (32). These "vernacular formations of everyday life" become articulated within the initiative through the ways readers have "erratically" responded to the text (32). However, the responses that capture this convivial sense of multiculture are decidedly *not* "spontaneous." As Fuller and Procter tell us, the novel "affords … an examination of

racist attitudes and structures" (37). It reveals how reading can be a shared experience that finds "intersubjective bridges" between readers and their experience with the text (37). In other words, the responses are a function of the ways in which the text *cultivates* certain responses that often suggest edifying lessons for the reader. Consider one of the cited readers, Susan ("a white focus group participant in Liverpool") who lends her mother the novel in order to prevent her from developing prejudiced and bigoted views (37). Fuller and Procter rightly explain that Susan's "understanding of literary hierarchy within which Levy's text ranks higher than genre fiction … is … (implicitly) not only better writing, but *'better' for the reader* in a moral or educational sense" (37; my emphasis). The "everyday" "vernacular" interaction Susan has with *Small Island* explicitly illustrates here how the text becomes elevated as a cultural artefact that inspires moral enrichment. Such responses logged by Fuller and Procter represent, then, less of an "errati[c]" erupti[on]" that occurs within the process of reading and more of a calculated edifying experience encouraged by the text (32).

What we find in Susan's moral investment in *Small Island* is an effect of what I suggest to be the novel's *revelatory cosmopolitanism*. As we have seen, Levy's text relies upon readerly revelation as a means to consummate connections between the disparate narratives. With the use of explicit and unmistakable parallels, the stories begin to cohesively come together as the reader progresses through the divergent voices. The text enacts the very kind of demotic cosmopolitanism that Gilroy delineates through Montesquieu: a "cosmopolitan position" that "carefully cultivate[s] [a] degree of [cultural] estrangement" (*After Empire* 78). This "ethical method" offers a conception of cosmopolitanism that remains embedded not simply in enlightenment thinking (of which Montesquieu was of course a central figure), but

in the ways in which it requires an enlightening result (78). That is, the "cosmopolitan position" that Montesquieu holds describes the imaginative work of a writer who has "*learn[ed]*" to "cultivat[e] estrangement" (78; my emphasis) in ways that articulate methods of "interact[ing] equitably with others" (79). The "cultural work" that *Small Island* has been made to perform, particularly through *Small Island Read 2007*, attempts to occupy precisely this "cosmopolitan position" (Fuller and Procter 26). Readers are meant to resource the varying degrees of estrangement compelled by the novel's discrepant form as a means to cultivate more open and "equitable" engagements or understandings of others. Put another way, the utility of *Small Island* derives from its ability to inspire cross-cultural revelations.

The novel's enunciation of a revelatory cosmopolitanism (at both the level of form and content) works against the inherently indeterminate qualities of conviviality. The "failed" encounters we saw in Berry's poetry become "successfully" rendered in Levy's narrative in ways that confirm the edifying impulses of the text. Take for instance, the multiple moments of misunderstanding within the novel. When Queenie asks the newly arrived Hortense if "cat got [her] … tongue," she wonders if she might have to live with a cat (Levy, *Small Island* 227). When Hortense attempts to buy a tin of condensed milk, the grocer responds with "[n]o light of comprehension" (331). When Ashok, a local Indian army guard, asks Bernard "are you ever wondering why the British are coming here to India," he mutes out his voice: "[t]his Ashok had obviously asked me something" (387). And when Gilbert delivers his impassioned conciliatory speech, Bernard "just can't understand a single word" (526). While these moments of failed communication, which occur throughout the novel, may seem to gesture towards the predicaments of a convivial encounter, they instead narratologically transform into opportunities of

successful comprehensive for the reader who forges this understanding into what becomes the distinctive pathos of the text. Instances of misunderstanding shape not only the humour in the novel (as with Queenie and Hortense), and the irony (as we saw with Bernard and Ashok), but also the heartbreak (particularly with Gilbert's speech). The ways in which readers are able to understand these failed interactions contribute to the "affective immediacy" of the novel, which enables a readerly identification within the moments of failed communication (James 58). The "critical involvement" that is asked of readers, as David James puts it, demonstrates how the novel attempts to pass on the burden of comprehension to the reader (61). While the characters often remain unable to communicate, the reader is meant to remedy this by providing the necessary missing links. The reader is rarely, if ever, left in a moment of miscomprehension – a kind of hermeneutics that Lyotard's notion of beginning might have inspired. Rather, because the reader inhabits a revelatory role, he or she dominates and deciphers the degree of understanding engendered by the text.

This hermeneutical privilege afforded to the reader reaches its pinnacle in what has become the culminating scene (and ultimate new beginning) of the novel: the adoption of baby Michael. The child, as many have argued, captures the so-called future of multicultural Britain. His birth marks a generational legacy that remains grounded within the intertwining events of the hurricane, the War and the *Windrush*. The child becomes symbolic of the intimately entangled encounters which constitute the cross-cultural realties of London in the 1940s. Within the narrative, Levy tracks this entanglement through the textual circulation of the baby. As each of the characters come into physical contact with the child – Queenie embraces Michael after his birth (Levy, *Small Island* 483), Bernard lets him "suc[k] on his finger"

(509), Hortense holds him while waiting for Queenie's tea (518), and Gilbert meanwhile gives him "his finger to chew" (518) – readers are invited to imagine the different implications each relationship provokes. What would it mean for Bernard, the most explicitly racist character in the novel, to adopt baby Michael? How would Queenie come to terms with the complexities of raising a mixed-raced, illegitimate child in postwar Britain? These momentary connections established between the baby and each character sets up multiple convivial encounters which remain pregnant with unexpected consequences. Each moment is rendered in spontaneous, unpredictable and painfully precarious ways.

However, because the narrative mobility of baby Michael also imitates the paratactic structure of the novel, Levy reminds us of the reader's position as the arbiter of revelation and knowledge. The cosmopolitan opportunity of this moment only presents itself through the reader who is given the interpretive space to imagine the different possibilities provoked by Michael's textual movement. Every uncertain physical connection baby Michael makes with each character offers a potential convivial encounter; but, in its conclusion, *Small Island* problematic undoes and nullifies the indeterminacies which conjoins the child to the characters. As Gilbert and Hortense decide to adopt the baby, Levy inserts narrative cues that both recalls Hortense's own adoptive upbringing ("[a]s a child I was given away too" she tells Gilbert [527]) alongside the fact that baby Michael remains biologically related to Hortense (upon hearing that the baby's name is Michael, she "flinche[s] … "look[ing] up … so quickly she startled the baby" [517]). Such cues alert us to the fact that baby Michael functions less as a spontaneous and unpredictable effect of the cultural entanglements that have defined 1948, and more of a useful plot device that brings the narrative to a well-paced climactic close.

This last scene also exposes profound connections between the characters that, as Perfect rightly suggests, "none of the four protagonists are ever to grasp" (39). Yet, it is precisely these connections, which Levy is so keen to emphasize, that remain so troubling. Putting aside the dubious racial politics of reproduction here, through which "a black woman is placed in service to white women's reproductive sexuality," the novel demonstrates that it is unable to imagine any kind of "coming together" of these disconnected narratives and relations (Carroll 75). The excessive related-ness of baby Michael enunciates the text's inability to render the unpredictable and spontaneous convivial dimensions of 1948 London. England indeed becomes a small island where the notion of the family retains its conservative nuclear and biological frame. While the characters remain unaware of the child's background – only the reader knows this "secret" – the novel ensures, through its tactics of interpretive amplification, that *we* know the truth (Levy, *Small Island* 529). Despite the questionable politics of the adoption, which as John McLeod astutely reminds us "safely accommodate[s] and neutralize[s]" the child's "disruptive presence," the reader is able to retain an omniscient moral high ground ("Postcolonial Fictions" 50). In the world of the novel, baby Michael's adoption can be read as "ultimately, in collusion with the dominant discourse of racial difference which installs unbridgeable distances in … 1948 Britain" (McLeod, "Postcolonial Fictions" 50).

By the end, the novel provides us with a questionable and paradoxical account of 1948 London. On the one hand, for the reader who has been "coached" throughout the text to spot the parallels and interconnections constructed by Levy, the text suggestively cultivates an edifying readerly perspective that marks the contours of a comfortable revelatory cosmopolitanism (Lang 136). On the other

hand, we are privy to the ways in which the narrative develops overly composed connections that are constructed *in service of* these revelatory moments. The child is thus a product of historical entanglements that are distinctly overwrought and heavy-handed. While this modality of engaging with the sign of 1948 pluralizes the moment through the diversity of narratives provided, it also robs it of its contingent quality. That is, the novel tries too hard to construct a formal (and neat) cosmopolitanism for the reader, and in doing so, it cannot provide an ending that remains open to the unknown, unpredictable contingent qualities of the moment. *Small Island*, in its conclusion, offers us a conservative narrative where a mixed-raced child can only exist in Britain with a black family. The child is circumscribed not only by his skin colour but also his genes, as he is both racially and biologically assigned to Hortense and Gilbert. If baby Michael is to stands for the beginning of a multi-racial Britain, then this troubling circumscription offers us a bleak view not only of the moment, but also of the legacy that it represents.

Conclusion

Where Berry's *Windrush Songs* pluralizes the meaning of the *Windrush* and sign of 1948 by lyrically exploring the unexpected consequences of failed convivial encounters, Levy's text (which explicitly inhabits a multiplicity of viewpoints) paradoxically offers more of what Lyotard would call a "grand-narrative" of the Windrush moment (*The Postmodern Condition*). The hermeneutic surplus provoked by the formal features of the novel end up negating the plural interpretations it rhetorically attempts to impel. The multiple beginnings set up in *Small Island*

coalesce into one genesis moment (the adoption of baby Michael) where we find a fraught attempt to capture the potential for a cosmopolitan future shaped by 1948. At the level of form and content, Levy's novel seems to be concerned with the predicaments of conviviality in 1948 London and the ensuing cultural complications and entanglements that it necessarily prompts. However, while Berry's aeolian poetics draw attention to the contingent and un-generative aspects of what it might mean to "live together" in the difficult circumstances of postwar England, Levy's text delineates a more constructed and reproductive notion of coming together that makes predictable such a contingent activity. Levy's *Small Island* cannot realize a radically inoperative account of the *Windrush* in the dynamic ways that Berry's poetry can.

The resulting "new contexts" and "frames of reference" that Levy and Berry (in their own ways) attempt to depict, proffers then a counter-intuitive commentary regarding the nature of cosmopolitan (or convivial) representations (Markham, "Roots and Roots" 22). Through differing genres, both Levy and Berry have powerfully captured what Berry once described as the "knocks [that] hurt both ways"; these writers crucially explore the way in which encounters between so-called "hosts" and "guests" remain infinitely complicated and difficult, for *both sides* (*Fractured Circles* 13). Thus, *Small Island* and *Windrush Songs* render these complications through an aesthetic modality (be it lyrical or realist) that fundamentally investigates *multiple* contexts and frames of reference. For Berry, this is depicted through his aeolian poetry, and for Levy, the persistent perspectival shifts in her narrative. Yet, as we have just seen, a focus on narrative multiplicity does not necessarily yield a progressive or radical reimaginative act on the part of the writer. Rather, such a modality of representation (often associated with cosmopolitan ideas)

identifies more of a rhetorical strategy that critics are far too keen to celebrate. By closely investigating the nature of such representational methods – without taking for granted the notion that greater discursive multiplicity inevitably grants a more edifying narrative (a point that has unfortunately left Berry's collection largely unexamined) – we can better discern the reimaginative politics deployed when twenty-first-century writers revisit this much-celebrated moment in postwar history.

2   1981/1982, Cosmopolitan Articulations
Riots, Uprisings, and the Falklands War

The dramatic opening sequence of the 1988 crime thriller *For Queen and Country* begins with the camera panning down on a group of drunken British soldiers belligerently stumbling out of what appears to be a non-descript British pub. The slow, comfortable pacing of the scene depicts a carefree moment of revelry that betrays a more complicated narrative as the bottom of the screen reveals that this is "Northern Ireland 1979." While the film's protagonist Rueben (a St. Lucian-born black British paratrooper) attempts to drive home his belching, intoxicated friend and fellow paratrooper Fish, they are suddenly ambushed by four supposed IRA gunmen, wearing balaclavas and bearing thick Northern Irish accents (should viewers be unsure). Rueben is shot in the shoulder and the car smashes into an aluminium barricade boldly reading – "Brits Out" – with the tricolour flag emblazoned above. Staggering to the safety of an approaching British tanker, the two friends are ordered to put their guns down, to which an indignant, and still tipsy, Fish replies: "We're 2 PARA you stupid bastards. Does he [Reuben] look like a paddy … Sir?" Alongside the steady, jingoistic pulse of a marching beat, the camera swiftly cuts to the "South Atlantic 1982," where Rueben and Fish are now ready to deploy for battle on the Falkland Islands. As the paratroopers dutifully file out, the commander singles out Reuben, grabbing him on the shoulder to give one last bit of advice: "Give them fucking hell."

Starring a young Denzel Washington as Reuben and directed by Martin Stellman (who co-wrote the script with Trix Worrell),[1] *For Queen and Country* provocatively explores the complicated allegiances of a black British soldier in Thatcher's 1980s Britain. The slow-paced, gritty thriller crucially intertwines Britain's postimperial conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Falklands within the complexities of a domestic conflict fought on the battlegrounds of the dilapidating council estates in South London. As Reuben returns home to the destitution of Thatcher's England, he finds himself caught between the frontlines of a new, internal war amongst the police, the state and England's growing underclasses. In the ensuing crime narrative – where a local (white) policeman is killed by a gang led by Reuben's (black) friend Lynford – Stellman and Worrell make sure to blur any clear or cohesive racial distinctions: "criminals are black *and* white, and there are black *and* white victims of Thatcher's unsocial system" (Korte 33). It is this refusal to depict a simplistic account of 1980s Britain that makes this largely forgotten film so poignantly significant.[2] From the vantage of its black British protagonist, the film captures the piercing contradictions that constitute Reuben's shifting alliances throughout the narrative. For Fish, Rueben's blackness marks him out as unmistakably British (or, at the very least, non-Irish). Carrying his injured friend in Northern Ireland, Fish loudly makes explicit Reuben's fundamental, though paradoxical, connection to the "Brits Out" sign: his black skin signifies the

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[1] Worrell most famously created and co-wrote the popular Chanel 4 comedy series *Desmond's* (1989-1994). The show depicted one of the first sitcoms on British television that featured predominantly black characters in the workplace (particularly, Desmond's barbershop).

[2] The much-neglected *For Queen and Country* resonates in many ways with Neil Jordan's more popular and critically praised thriller *The Crying Game* (1992), which also features a black British soldier (played by Forest Whitaker) attacked and, in this case, kidnapped by the IRA. Both films attempt to capture the complex allegiances of its black British characters while also drawing attention to the muted parallels between black Britain and Northern Ireland. *For Queen and Country* also retains an important cultural significance as it notably features a young Stephen Lawrence as a film extra. Lawrence, a black British man, was murdered in 1993 in what was to become one of the highest profile racial attacks in UK history.

recognition of a colonial past and attachment to Britain that has perversely entrenched itself within Thatcher's postimperial war machine. The black British soldier becomes distinguished here as an exemplary articulation of British militarism in the 1980s.

While the majority of the film's action takes place within the graffiti-strewn alleyways and corridors of the concrete council estates, it does not, as Jeffrey Walsh has suggested, represent events like the Falklands conflict "only as a veiled historical influence, empty of meaning" (46). Rather, the film in general, and Reuben in particular, posit the 1980s as a distinctive conjuncture that traces the difficult implications of Britain's global reassertion of postimperial might alongside a local reiteration of such power. Distraught by an allegiance to a country that accepts him as a (black) solider yet rejects him as a citizen, Reuben dramatically illustrates the contradictory and tangled alliances that defined, as we shall soon see, the complicated contours of black Britishness in the 1980s. The film's overt engagement with the politics of the moment – for instance, the 1981 British Nationality Act which strips Reuben of his citizenship rights – incisively demonstrates these shifting alliances, ultimately leading to Reuben's violent downfall. By the end of the film, Reuben has painfully drifted back and forth between the various frontlines depicted in the film: from a dutiful solider and law-abiding citizen to an angry and murderous vigilante, determined to seek revenge for the accidental shooting of Fish by the police. The last image on our screen is of Reuben unknowingly caught in the crosshairs of a police marksman – an apt metaphor for the destructive nature of the messy alliances he is forced to negotiate.

For Queen and Country usefully frames the central debates of this chapter by conjugating histories of inner-city strife in England with the Falklands War and the

troubles in Northern Ireland. The three texts in this chapter – Alex Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane* (2001), Linton Kwesi Johnson's *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* (2002) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) – revisit the crosshairs of allegiances that compose this largely overlooked historical conjuncture, particularly within the field of contemporary black British writing, by delineating distinctive cosmopolitanisms precisely shaped by this moment. That these three contemporary black British writers should return to this specific juncture indicates the relevance of what I propose to be a unique sign of history (1981/1982), which entangles the unexamined cross-cultural possibilities of events like the Brixton uprisings in 1981 alongside the more general postimperial fault lines of the 1982 Falklands War. I envision 1981/1982 as an increasingly recognizable sign within contemporary black British literature that critically marries the aesthetic and political implications between local and global moments of unrest. The texts examined in this chapter have each been stimulated by the conjuncture of 1981/1982 in ways that have inspired newly configured "coalition-building identifications" within the narratives (Mercer 28). These writers pluralize the sign of 1981/1982 through discrete articulations of cosmopolitanism, which productively expose the conflicting and contradictory identifications that have constituted recent theories of cosmopolitanism.

From each text, three different *cosmopolitan articulations* emerge, shaped by various textual negotiations with the past. I borrow the concept of articulation from Stuart Hall, who carefully details the term in this way:

> In England, the term has a nice double meaning because "articulate" means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we also speak of an "articulated" lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but

> need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. ("On Postmodernism and Articulation" 53; original emphasis)

While Hall defines articulation in terms of ideology and ideological struggle, I want to focus on this particular passage as it offers a lucid rendering of the concept as both a poetics and politics of interaction: articulation remains a powerful term in that it linguistically captures the discursive and aesthetic qualities of any given discourse (its "language-ing") alongside the flexible conditions through which it becomes unified or uttered. This understanding of articulation productively abbreviates the ways in which Wheatle, Johnson and Smith construct their own, historically-grounded, textual enunciations of cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan drive of, for instance, Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane*, becomes shaped precisely by its explicitly "popular" and "realist" articulation. Wheatle's so-called transparent narrative of the Brixton riots, which many critics have derided, enables the text to imagine cross-cultural linkages for its characters by bringing together disparate, yet related histories of oppression. Johnson's Penguin Modern Classics collection of verse *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* also proffers a certain poetic modality of transparency in his engagement with the 1980s. Through Penguin's paratextual framing of the collection, his textually conditioned dub poetry – what I term "Penguinized dub" – sanctions new connections with different poems in ways that demonstrate a poetic cosmopolitanism forged through "a unity" of various resistance movements from around the world. In contradistinction, Smith's *White Teeth* (which has been lauded as an exemplary cosmopolitan narrative), *dis*articulates the overwrought intercultural relations garrulously constructed in the text. By examining one of the more

problematic characters in the novel, Samad Iqbal, we can see how the narrative continually questions the possibility for any kind of critical or salutary cosmopolitanism. *White Teeth*'s latent reactionary politics, which vicariously evokes Margaret Thatcher within its narrative, demonstrates the ways in which it undermines opportunities for productive alliances. *White Teeth* is the one text in the chapter that is hesitant to offer a progressive notion of cosmopolitanism (the implications of which I shall return to in the conclusion).

The reimaginative tendency that this chapter is keen to outline – between twenty-first-century black British texts and the conjuncture of 1981/1982 – resists the kind of analysis that confidently separates black British literature directly influenced by the 1980s from the contemporary literature that belatedly revisits that moment. This approach ossifies the distinctions between the various generations of black British writers by interrupting the fruitful conversations between the generations and, more importantly, the literature. In her essay "The 1980s: Retheorising and Refashioning Identity," R. Victoria Arana advocates exactly this: that contemporary black British (which she re-dubs as African British) writing, has fundamentally shifted from the "bitterness and anger evident in the work of the 1980s' generation" into a refashioned literature that "emphasise[s] a positive attitude" (230; 238). The "newly proposed nomenclature" of African British "dismantles," Arana argues, "the politically constructed multicultural Blackness that police brutality and institutionalised racism inspired in the writers of the early 1980s" (238). While Arana tells us that African British writing is necessarily informed by the politics of the 1980s, her terminological modification implicitly figures "multicultural Blackness" as a contaminated concept, compromised through the discursive ground of its formation. Such a shift in terms rhetorically severs two

generations of writers by relegating *black British* to the "bitter" 1980s, while championing *African British* for our more matured and "positive" contemporary moment.

The texts in this chapter challenge Arana's argument, by demonstrating that black British writers do not necessarily look to "a continent of origin" (i.e. Africa) in their creative work, nor do they produce literature that remains exclusively consigned to the moment of their conception (238). These writers do not inevitably articulate a "positive attitude," nor do they represent experiences exclusive to their own ethnic or cultural backgrounds. The problematic modality of thinking that shapes Arana's conception of the term African British informs the kinds of limiting questions that are persistently asked of black British cultural producers. As one interviewer put it to Steve McQueen, a black British director and screenwriter whose first feature film, *Hunger*, focused on the 1981 Northern Ireland hunger-strikes: "one could expect you, as a young black Briton to be more affected by the Brixton riots, at the time…. I'm wondering why the story of Bobby Sands won out with you".[3]

McQueen's filmic re-creation of the 1981 hunger-strikes disputes the troubling identity politics that expects black British writers (and artists in general) to portray only the experiences of black people in Britain. A term such as "African British" reifies a version of this politics which necessarily burdens the black British writer with an assumed African "cultural heritage" (Arana 238). However, as I contend in this chapter, it is becoming increasingly difficult to limit contemporary black British writers to any rigid or codified conceptualization of their purported cultural heritage or background. Wheatle, Johnson and Smith all engage with 1981/1982 as a means not only to move beyond the parameters of black Britain, but

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[3] This interview, conducted by the film critic Jason Solomons, can be found in the special features section of the 2009 DVD (Pathé).

also to explore new cross-cultural alliances and allegiances that do not necessarily index (or champion) a more general African British experience. In many ways, these writers return to Hall's well-rehearsed suggestion about black British cultural politics in the 1980s that "a change from a struggle over relations of representation to a politics of representation" is beginning to occur, where ethnicity, as a discursive category, replaces identity, as a modality that "engages rather than suppresses *difference*" ("New Ethnicities" 27; 29 original emphasis). Wheatle, Johnson, and Smith offer a distinctly contemporary enunciation of Hall's "new ethnicities" by cross-hatching discrepant and, at times, conflicting cultural contexts, subjectivities and political positions within their work. Unlike Hall however, these writers articulate the complexities of "new ethnicities" through a cosmopolitan discourse interested in the dynamics between the local and the global, the community and the masses, the subaltern and the hegemonic. Where Hall figures the global "as something having more to do with the hegemonic sweep at which a certain configuration of local particularities try to dominate the whole scene," the texts explored in this chapter grapple with the difficult interaction between the local and the global in ways that seek new opportunities for engagement between the two ("Old and New Identities" 67). While *For Queen and Country* struggles to articulate such opportunities, particularly within Reuben's shifting matrix of allegiances, the twenty-first-century narratives examined here provocatively attempt to do just this.

Postimperial Brixton and the Shifting Frontlines in Alex Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane*

> … a frontline is not merely a physical space; it is also a psychological state and a way of life.
>
> – Ferdinand Dennis (*Behind the Frontlines* 198)

In a 1996 keynote address at the "Frontlines / Backyards" conference in London, Stuart Hall engages the metaphor of the frontline as a means to delineate a newly-emergent black British identity and culture distinct to the 1990s. Hall returns to the well-worn frontline metaphor not to reaffirm its enduring stability, but rather its increasing precariousness in marking out combative differences between so-called black and white cultures. In its most intense moment of articulation, the frontlines of 1970s and 1980s Britain became highly visible vanguard boundaries associated with conflict and violence between black communities of resistance and the state (particularly the police). For writer and journalist Ferdinand Dennis, these frontlines, especially in the 1980s, demarcated frontier zones that circumscribed black British communities within the ghettoized inner cities of a postimperial Britain. With the aftermath of the 1981 and 1985 Brixton and Toxteth riots, these zones became metonyms for "flashpoints" of confrontation and "conflicts with the law" (Dennis ix). Areas like Liverpool's Toxteth, Sheffield's Havelock Square, Birmingham's Handsworth, Cardiff's Tiger Bay, Bristol's St. Paul's and London's Brixton bore witness to the neglected redevelopment policies and discriminatory legacies of housing in the postwar era. Hall suggests that since "blackness is no longer necessarily a counter or resistance identity," as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, the border zones that make up the concept of the frontlines no longer make sense ("Aspiration and Attitude" 39). Not only have the 1990s experienced a blurring of

"the politicised edge between black and white culture"; in a neoliberal, post-Thatcher world, black cultures themselves have developed their own internal frontlines (38).[4]

Where Hall recognizes the inward segmentation of black British culture and identity in the 1990s, Alex Wheatle in his novel *East of Acre Lane* traces these internal shifts and fractures *back* to the black youth communities of 1980s Brixton – the "bad lands of South London" (Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* 1). In his revisiting of Brixton's urban frontlines, Wheatle's text signposts two historical markers that gesture towards the black culture of resistance Hall ascribes to the 1980s – the New Cross Fire and subsequent demonstration and the Brixton uprisings of 1981. On the first page of the novel, underneath the chapter heading, we read: "27 January 1981" (1). This is just nine days after the New Cross Fire and less than three months before the Brixton riots. By spotlighting specific dates beneath each chapter while detailing precise locations – the first chapter begins "somewhere behind Stockwell Tube Station" – Wheatle's narrative attempts to pinpoint and, more importantly, challenge the frontlines of the text as necessarily shaping a "politicised edge" that divides black and white cultures (2). The novel's most discernable separation between black communities and the "white culture" of the state can be seen in the abusive, oppressive and racist actions of the Metropolitan Police in Brixton, which are directly linked by the characters to the "'Ome Secretary" William Whitelaw and "de Ironheart lady" Margaret Thatcher (85; 170). Amongst the "ghetto youths" in the novel – Biscuit, Coffin Head, Floyd, Sceptic, Smiley, and Brenton – there is an intense distrust of the police. As Smiley laments to the policeman who pulls him

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[4] In his discussion of black British identity here, Hall is specifically referring to "Afro-Caribbean communities" (38). In the context of his argument, Hall argues that since the 1990s it is no longer possible to group Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities together as the two ethnic groups have become too fractured to analyse in the same category.

over: "Your people 'ave stopped me before, man. I'm safe. Ain't you got nutten better to do? Shouldn't you be finding out who fling a petrol bomb in dat party at Deptford de uder day" (34). This keen historical awareness on the part of the characters alerts us to Wheatle's vigilance in headlining (and later reassessing) the signs of history that have constituted the 1980s as a formative moment within (black) Britain.

The novel traces the systemic corruption and misconduct of the police during the early 1980s while following the difficulties of its protagonist Biscuit, aka Lincoln Huggins, who struggles to take care of his family as he "sells herb" on Brixton's frontlines. Yet, despite such abuses of police power (epitomized in the brutal use of the "sus" laws and operation SWAMP), *East of Acre Lane* more provocatively draws our attention to the internal policing within Brixton itself. By detailing the ruthlessness of the black Brixtonian crime lord Nunchaks, who oppresses, controls and victimizes the "ghetto youths," the novel exposes the *internecine* violence and strife within the community. Nunchaks' cruelty becomes, in many ways, more threatening to the characters than the targeted violence from the police. Wheatle's narrative calls into question the assumed (and often homogenizing) solidarity between black British youths behind the frontlines of 1981 Brixton. Indeed, as I want to suggest, Wheatle's sense of 1980s postimperial Britain, which sees the reiteration of new forms of imperial and colonial domination within the country, becomes refracted through a distinctly postimperial *Brixton* that demonstrates the mechanisms of this domination repeated by the very communities that experience the brunt of state oppression.

Wheatle's twenty-first-century reimagining of Brixton's frontlines remains notably forged by his own personal history. As a child of separated Jamaican

parents, Wheatle was placed in a Surrey children's home at the age of four by his father who could no longer care for him (an experience that would inform his 2002 book *The Seven Sisters*). After a difficult childhood spent in care, Wheatle returned to Brixton in the late 1970s where he became a DJ and founding member of the Crucial Rocker sound system, performing under the alias Yardman Irie (the name of a character which appears in a number of Wheatle's novels). As a troubled teenager living in a Brixton hostel, he experienced frontline life in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By the age of 18, Wheatle was finishing a short prison sentence at Wormword Scrubs in West London. Under the guidance of his Rastafarian cellmate, who finds his echo in the Rasta sage Jah Nelson in *East of Acre Lane*, Wheatle finally pursued his ambition to write. Much of this background shapes Wheatle's creative work, particularly *East of Acre Lane*. As Wheatle explained to Hugh Stoddart in an interview about the novel: "I tried to portray what I felt, what my friends felt, living through that time" (13).

East of Acre Lane is the second part of Wheatle's Brixton trilogy which captures iconic historical moments within the urban, working-class, black British experience. Wheatle organizes the three texts in more or less generational terms: Biscuit, the second generation, is the son of Hortense and Cilbert Huggins, the first generation "Windrush" couple of *Island Songs* (2005) who migrate from Jamaica to England in 1960. The last part of the trilogy, *The Dirty South* (2008), features Dennis Huggins, Biscuit's son, who still struggles with the lure of gang life in twenty-first-century South London. As characters weave through each of these texts (for instance, Hortense and her sister Jenny feature in all three novels), Wheatle narratologically maps the shifting alliances and complicated transformations within black British working-class communities, particularly in Brixton.

Wheatle has written four other novels, *Brixton Rock* (1999)*, The Seven Sisters* (2002)*, Checkers* (2003), co-written with Mark Parham, and *Brenton Brown* (2011), all of which have received numerous accolades and praise. Yet while his texts enjoy commercial success, Wheatle's work has garnered little academic attention. Much of the criticism surrounding his novels – and those black British "popular" fictions, to use Andy Wood's term (2006), of Courttia Newland and Diran Adebayo – have targeted their assumed parochial scope. In a well-known essay on contemporary black British writing, Kwame Dawes argues that the work of these novelists (Wheatle, Newland and Adebayo) demonstrate "a strange uncertainty about how to locate this black British experience in the larger British world" ("Negotiating the Ship" 23). With reference to Wheatle's *Brixton Rock* (1999), Newland's *Society Within* (1999) and Adebayo's *My Once Upon a Time* (2000), John Clement Ball rearticulates Dawes' charge of insularity by suggesting that while "[t]hese fast-paced narratives … make for compelling reading and provide some fascinating insights into urban subcultures," the metropolitan geography represented in these texts "[s]idelin[e] the world outside London … focus[ing] on the present tenses of young characters swept up in the tense present" (225-6). Such novels, for Ball, assert a deflated confidence which "lay[s] claim to a transforming urban landscape and society … with temporal and spatial blinders" (226).

Responding to the discrepancy between the "lack of critical interest and commercial success" of Wheatle's texts, Johanna Immonen looks to Wheatle's distinctive "realist" and "popular" aesthetics, which she suggests eschews "postmodern" and "postcolonial" styles of writing (98). The exploration of postmodern and postcolonial themes, coupled with the representation of strong female characters have become, for Immonen, markers of a critically successful

black British novel: Wheatle's texts do not laud "theoretic and celebratory" models of hybridity and multiculturalism, and this accounts in part for their critical neglect (98). Despite conflating the qualities of so-called postcolonial and postmodern texts while simplifying, to some extent, the cultural scope of Wheatle's writing, Immonen's argument nonetheless offers a useful synopsis of criticism regarding Wheatle's oeuvre. As Immonen rightly suggests, a common theme emerges: Wheatle's "popular" novels, while energetic and engaging, are seen to convey uncomplicated and depoliticized realist narratives that cannot see the world outside their representative localized urban spaces. His novels are deemed, in both form and content, too parochial.

Such critical appraisals of Wheatle's work, particularly *East of Acre Lane*, elide the significance of the provocative relationship developed between the text and its historical context. As James Procter reminds us, "there is a notable absence of insurrection within black British literatures" of the 1970s and 1980s (95). Literary representations of rioting and resistance seen in the works of Linton Kwesi Johnson, Farrukh Dhondy and Salman Rushdie, becomes a "*problem* of representation," and is thus figured as a "*problem* of narration, rather than as the transparent object of its narrative" (95). Wheatle's contemporary portrayal of the climate of insurrection in 1981 Brixton finally offers what might be termed "a narrative of transparency" less overtly anxious about issues of representation. Critics of Wheatle's work take the aesthetic directness of his novels as representative of an insular realism that superficially engages with black British youth culture. I argue, however, that in revisiting 1981 Brixton, *East of Acre Lane* offers a rewriting of the "flashpoints" of confrontation that distinguish between black communities of resistance and the state in postimperial Britain. Wheatle interrogates the notion that a politics of resistance

necessarily yields a community in solidarity, and he does this through an aesthetic modality rarely explored in black British literary representations of the Brixton uprisings. The riots in *East of Acre Lane* may not function as a means to decipher aesthetic or narrative dilemmas. Rather they serve as a crucial plot device in the novel: in the high moment of a black British assertion of resistance we are presented with violent fissures *between* the black "ghetto youths" in ways that shift the focus away from black solidarity and toward new cross-cultural links created from within Brixton's, more general, working-class communities. The narrative of *East of Acre Lane*, which remains dedicated to enunciating the boundaries surrounding Brixton, does not, as Ball suggests, neglect the world outside of London. Rather, the solutions that the novel's Rastafarian sage Jah Nelson offers against the parochialism of 1981 Brixton reveal a distinctly Afro-centric cosmopolitan worldview that assertively looks beyond (black) Britain. In its conclusion, the text seeks to value global connections over local or national affiliations.

The novel's preoccupation with unsettling the frontier lines of Brixton begins with its narrative reimagining of local space. Wheatle's text draws clear territorial boundaries around the lives of the "ghetto youths," as the setting of *East of Acre Lane* becomes circumscribed within the limited geographic perimeters of Brixton. Even the novel's title pronounces a local specificity that is significant to the text, as almost all the action occurs on the streets and roads east of Acre Lane, London: on Brixton Road, Herne Hill, Coldharbour Lane, Atlantic Road, Denmark Road, Railton Road, Croydon Road and Mayall Road, to name a few. Because of this, the characters have an acute sense of their enclosed existence. Denise, Biscuit's sister, screams to their mother Hortense that she cannot find a suitable boyfriend because, "[d]is is SW9 not SW1" (Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* 19). The South London

postcode SW9, which marks off Stockwell, parts of Brixton and Clapham, becomes the only space the characters can socialize and call home. While Biscuit curses the "boarded-up housing, the rubbish on the streets, the graffiti that covered the railways bridges," he recognizes that "he was part of his environment just as much as the rundown church" (8). The characters are also keenly aware of the limits and borderlines of this space. On their way to buy a Colt 45, Coffin Head and Sceptic search for "The Cheeky Bell Toller," a pub in Rotherhithe – "National Front country" Sceptic tells us (145). Both "ghetto youths" are terrified to leave the territory of Brixton and are deeply cognisant of how unwelcome they are outside of this space. As they walk down the aptly named Albion Street, Sceptic registers their dislocation, "[d]ey should call it black-people-don't-belong street" (147). Rotherhithe is clearly too east of Acre Lane.

The narrative's emphasis on the border zones of Brixton, and the ways in which the characters are circumscribed within these boundaries, describes the mechanisms of a unique 1980s postimperialism which sees Brixton as Britain's new provincial colony within: a process that marks a doubly reversed colonization. As we saw in chapter one, the "first generation" of Windrush migrants originally "reversed" colonization (so Louise Bennett tells us), settling from the colonies to the "Motherland" in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Through the satirical voice of Miss Lou, Bennett's poem "Colonization in Reverse" (1966) proposed a witty riposte to the enduring consequences of the global system of colonization. The movement of Jamaicans to the "Motherland" articulated a role reversal in Bennett's poem, which saw colonial subjects moving from the periphery to the imperial centre. However, this was always a tenuous and uneven reversal. Vulnerable to discriminatory housing and employment opportunities, the colonial subjects clearly did not exchange roles

with the colonizers. The liberatory and ludic potential of a reversed colonization became effectively contained by what I am calling here a double reverse colonization. In 1970s and 1980s Britain, new iterations of imperial power began to assert itself within the country through this double reversal. The rights granted through "reverse" colonization, for instance, of citizenship for colonial subjects through the British Nationality Act of 1948, slowly began to be revoked through various policies like the Immigration Act of 1971 and the Nationality Act of 1981. Removing the application of *jus soli* on British citizenship – being born in Britain no longer guaranteed rights as a citizen – activated what Sivanandan poignantly termed an "induced repatriation".[5] The new domestic Empire removed the rights of many colonial subjects while constructing ghettoized spaces through an internal colonization of the country.

In Wheatle's Brixton, contested frontier spaces define the dynamics between the colonizers (now the Metropolitan Police who monitor the colony), and the colonized (the "ghetto youths" who attempt to evade their repressive tactics). Railton Road, otherwise known as the "Front Line," becomes the primary "flashpoint" of confrontation between the police and the black British youths. Coffin Head experiences the policing mechanisms on the borderlands when he is arrested and abused under police custody. Finishing a stint "selling herb" on the "Line," Coffin Head sees "six dark uniforms converging on him" (104). As he hears "the dull echo of the polished black boots walking across the concrete," Coffin Head encounters less of a police squad than a menacing military force (104). While the police find no drugs on him, they nevertheless arrest Coffin Head, physically abusing and

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[5] In his criticism of both the Immigration Act of 1971 and the British Nationality Act of 1982, Sivanandan suggests that we can trace a movement from immigration control in the 1970s to an explicit induced repatriation that focused on the economic utility of migrants. As Sivanandan tells us: "The message is clearly that unproductive additions to working-class black families are unwanted. If you want family life, 'go home'" (134).

blackmailing him for information on other drug dealers. The revealing aspects of the postimperial nature of Coffin Head's incarceration are uncovered through his nightmares:

> He hadn't slept soundly since the beating, suffering nightmares of being thrown into a gladiatorial arena armed with just his fists, and having to fight a hundred truncheon-wielding policemen. A crowd of politicians would yell their approval as the Home Secretary, sitting on a regal throne, signalled a thumbs down…. (139-40)

Figured as a roman slave or captive, Coffin Head imagines the police as the imperial enforcers of the British government, as his beating becomes a spectacle of amusement for those in power. Significantly, the Emperor is not Margaret Thatcher, but William Whitelaw. The Home Secretary is cast in Coffin Head's dream as the leader of a postimperial Britain, who, through his championing of the "sus" laws, regally administers the oppression of inner-city black youths. By marking Brixton as a figurative Roman coliseum, Coffin Head dramatically reemphasizes the distinctions that separate those in the front and behind the frontlines. The coliseum of Imperial Rome becomes the postimperial playground of 1980s Britain.

However, Wheatle's narrative works against this Manichean portrayal of the frontlines, which demarcate the police from the "ghetto youths" in ways that construct both sides as uniform, oppositional entities. There is a crucial moment during Coffin Head's incarceration when a young policeman Milton watches his colleagues violently assault the defenceless youth. Disturbed by the scene, Milton proclaims, "I don't want no part of this" (110) and before he turns to walk away he "look[s] into Coffin Head's eyes," "shaking his head in disbelief" (111). The moment Milton makes eye contact with Coffin Head, the narrative begins to nuance

and subtly fracture the notion that all the policemen or "beastmen" represent an indistinguishable consolidated unit. Milton's identification with Coffin Head and rejection of the corrupt actions of the other policemen, mark him out as an ostensibly different generation of law enforcement that no longer epitomizes an antagonizing force for the "ghetto youths." In his rage though, Coffin Head vows revenge against *all* the police, and with his Colt 45 on riot day he aims to shoot any "beastman" "in his nosebridge" (228): "[c]os a violent oppressor," Coffin Head thinks to himself, "only takes notice of violence" (140). Yet, when he finally encounters an unguarded policeman, Coffin Head, "examin[ing] the eyes of his enemy," cannot pull the trigger (275). While Coffin Head feels the "awesome power" of "tak[ing] a life or grant[ing] one" (a seemingly empowering role-reversal where he hijacks the imperial position of the Home Secretary), he remains, in the end, unable to assume the brutality of this role. Both Coffin Head and Milton effectively shun violence, each in their own ways, by "seeing" the victim and thus unsettling the purported interchangeability between those in front and behind Brixton's frontlines. The generative metaphor of sight, one that I will return to later, figuratively delineates new visual frames for the characters which activate these unlikely sympathies.

East of Acre Lane writes against, then, much of the critical literature that reads both the metaphor and geography of the frontline as an emblem of a homogenous, and often resistant, black British community. As we have already seen, for Stuart Hall the 1970s and 1980s represent a culture of frontlines where blackness develops into a marked "resistance identity" ("Aspirations and Attitude" 39). Examining the atrophic urban geography of the frontline (particularly the neglected and deteriorating Railton Road), Michael Keith also finds a distinctive and near uniform articulation of a black Brixtonian community. As Keith reminds us,

"[n]owhere else was the living history of the Black community in Brixton so clearly embodied in bricks and mortar. There was no need continually to remember the past because on Railton Road more than anywhere else the past was always present" (25).[6] In his 1981 report on the Brixton riots, Lord Scarman rhetorically reiterates a version of this homogenous "resistance identity" of those behind the lines. He notes, "with hindsight in the aftermath of the disorders, 'the Front Line' may seem an apt description for an area where a *mob* battled with the police" (17; my emphasis). Both Scarman and Keith draw attention to the ways in which this borderline also served as a convivial space for the black community (Scarman 17; Keith 26). Black political groups such as the Black Unity and Freedom Party, the radical magazine *Race Today*, and the Brixton Neighbourhood Community Association, were based or assembled in and around the frontlines of Brixton. Whether resistant, combative, or convivial, the frontline repeatedly becomes a representative space that, above all else, captures a unique social solidarity amongst local black residents.

Wheatle's novel challenges these narratives of the frontline by questioning any neat conception of community and solidarity within the boundaries of Brixton. In the text, the characters fear the frontline. This is a place where "police," "bad men," or "madmen" are to be avoided (Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* 39). As Coffin Head tells Biscuit, "[t]oo much man who 'ave gone cuckoo" on the Line; "[t]oo much man wid a blade who would wet you for nutten" (68). Here we see the internal

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[6] As Lord Scarman highlights in his 1981 inquiry on the Brixton riots, "the physical environment in which the people of Brixton live and the police have to operate is one marked by decay" (6). This deterioration draws its history from the postwar era which saw the majority of Caribbean migrants occupying rental spaces in the Brixton and Clapham areas. While the dilapidating housing districts began to shrink in the 1960s and 1970s, some areas went through processes of rejuvenation, particularly the estates on Somerleyton Road (Keith 25). The areas of Railton Road and Mayall Road too were scheduled for repair; however, this project was defeated in 1975 (25). In 1977 only 22 of the 400 properties along Railton and Mayall Roads were "satisfactory in terms of state of repair, housing conditions and general environment quality" (Scarman 5).

frontlines of a fractured community. The boundaries of Railton Road are not just policed by the "beast," but also "bad men" and "madmen" from the black community itself. In this sense, the narrative flags the ways in which black characters are, to some extent, involved in the oppression of those who reside in Brixton. When Coffin Head is being questioned at the police station he remembers "the strange black guy with the Scottish accent" and immediately marks him as a "Fockin' traitor" (108). The "safari-jacketed black guy" may not have confirmed Coffin Head's "herb selling" to the police, but the fact that Coffin Head looks to him is significant (103). There is no sense of solidarity between these two black characters; rather, Coffin Head's suspicions demonstrate his scepticism toward any simplistic sense of black solidarity.

The characters highlight the ways Brixton becomes a space of postimperial domination, as forms of oppression are practiced not only from those outside the community (i.e. the police) but also from those within. The novel's talismanic figure of a postimperial Brixton is the crime lord, Nunchaks, who occupies the most destructive force within the text. The beginning of the novel sets the scene for Nunchaks' reign as he terrorizes Biscuit with threats of "peel[ing] … [his] fingers like raw carrot[s]" (6). Biscuit, who like Coffin Head, works for Nunchaks, burgling and "selling herb," wonders if the notorious crime lord has a "regular site for scaring the shit out of youths" (7). Like the police, Nunchaks enforces his own laws in Brixton which residents are made to comply with. But Nunchaks has wider ambitions. Peering out from his fourth-floor brothel, Nunchaks looks over the "towering chimneys of Battersea Power Station": "[w]ithin a year, he promised himself, they will fear my name 'pon de uder side of de river" (252). In casting his domination past the River Thames, expanding the boundaries of the quasi-colony he

administers, Nunchaks perverts Bennett's colonization in reverse as he attempts to subdue his own community. Nunchaks becomes the most threatening figure of oppression in what the novel constructs as a distinctly postimperial Brixton. The violent imagery ascribed to William Whitelaw, who transforms into an unyielding Roman emperor in Coffin Head's nightmares, is rather better suited to Nunchaks, whose name aptly draws inspiration from a weapon of combat.

While Nunchaks, like the rest of the "ghetto youths," is part of the black Brixtonian community, he remains notably un-policed. In no section of the novel does Nunchaks encounter the police nor does he remain circumscribed by any kind of state-sanctioned force. He remains uniquely positioned *outside* the system of oppression the black youths experience. Because of this, he becomes an uncomfortably omnipotent figure in the text that shifts the focus away from black versus white, male-dominated representations of the frontline and towards the more entangled inter-communal conflicts that shape the blurring boundaries of these border zones. Nunchaks creates new internal frontlines within Brixton that articulate various tiers of coercion that not only include the "ghetto youths," but more significantly, young women. Nunchaks' most disturbing methods of oppression are realized in his brothel, where he pimps young, often black, Brixtonian women to white men. After having intimidated Denise into prostitution, he saves her for the "white" men "wearing ah suit," hoping to maximize the exploitation of her body (252). Nunchaks' use and abuse of women in his community crudely rearticulates Sivanandan's argument that while the "struggles of blacks are the struggles of colonized people," it is the woman who remains "a colony of the colonized" (76). Indeed, it is Denise and her body that bear the most brutal brunt of Nunchaks' reign. She becomes wholly manipulated in a space where she finds no power to resist; with

a "swollen" cheekbone and "inflated" lip, she visits her friends Sharon and Carol not to escape, but to ask for money (Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* 237). Ironically, Nunchaks' complicity in the re-colonizing procedures of postimperial Britain demonstrates a true colonization in reverse, as he becomes the central oppressive force in Brixton. While Sivanandan's assertion neglects the ways in which the "struggles of blacks" can become complicit within the colonizing process, his contention remains pertinent for the novel, as the women in *East of Acre Lane*, particularly Denise, occupy the most neglected, exposed and vulnerable positions within the narrative.

The second night of the riots sets the stage for the novel's explosive climatic scene, which sees the rescue of Denise and the demise of Nunchaks. The chapter entitled "The Brixtoniad" marks with precision the start time of the riots: "6pm, 10 April 1981" (255). The first line of the chapter "scream[s], "Rage!" – the words written on a t-shirt worn by a "black youth who had just entered the Brixton market" (255). Wheatle proceeds to narrate a detailed account of the riots on both the 10th and 11th of April 1981, one that remains noticeably consistent with the sequences of events as laid out in Lord Scarman's report (indeed, Wheatle cites his use of Scarman's inquiry in his acknowledgments). Again, the frontlines of Britain's "colony within" demarcate the battlegrounds. As Biscuit notices, the "police reinforcements were coming from the direction of Brixton High Street and North of Atlantic Road, pushing the rioters by the Atlantic pub and up into Railton Road" (259). Driving the "mob" on to the "Front Line" (Railton Road), the police try to quell the crowd while preparing for battle along the boundaries of the colony (259). As a policeman chases a young, gravely injured black youth, the soon-to-be rioters respond to what seemed to them as yet another act of police violence against the

black community. Despite attempts by the policeman to help the adolescent, the crowds misread the volatile scene and gather to vent their frustration at the continued abuse of power by the Metropolitan Police.

While there is rage – for instance, in the throwing of petrol bombs and the commandeering of a local bus (all actual incidents recorded in Scarman's report) – the novel strikingly transforms the angry rioters into joyful revellers. As the narrator tells us, the rioters/revellers were "exhilarat[ed]" (260), "elat[ed]" (269), "celebrat[ing]" (281) and "rejoicing" (282). The booming words of Yardman Irie who openly "declare[s] WAR" against "Maggie T'atcher an' William Whitelaw," does so to a crowd of joyful partygoers dancing and screaming along to his performance (279). This scene, Immonen points out, "is not far removed from a colonial mutiny," although the war itself "can hardly aim at independence in the middle of the postimperial metropolis" (102). Instead of figuring the riots as an overtly politicized attempt to regain a semblance of "independence," they are depicted in Wheatle's narrative as an impromptu eruption by the community unable to bear its oppressive circumscription. The rioters/revellers reveal a roused yet tenuous community loudly coming together to refuse the colonization of Brixton.

This incendiary community of resistance, which marks one of the largest riots on the British mainland in the twentieth century, suggests the pinnacle of solidarity between Brixton's residents, specifically between the black "ghetto youths." But *East of Acre Lane* does not articulate the riots as *the* climactic moment of the narrative. The riots and the revelling become instead a backdrop for the violent consequences of a community breaking and remaking itself. The novel's climatic scene begins when Biscuit finally learns the whereabouts of his sister Denise who is spotted at Nunchaks' brothel in a block of flats by Clapham Road.

Armed with deadly weapons, Biscuit, Coffin Head, Sceptic, Floyd, and Brenton confront Nunchaks and his crew. Frank, Biscuit's Irish neighbour also joins the "ghetto youths" and his addition to this ostensibly more risky and radical uprising against Nunchaks remains the single most important feature of the novel's climax. In the ensuing brawl, it is Frank who fatally shoots Nunchaks with the gun that Coffin Head initially sought to claim his revenge upon the police. Symbolically, Nunchaks unseats the police here as the primary oppressive force in text, as it is he who must be removed for any kind of revolutionary transformation to occur. Killed with a bullet meant for the "beastmen," Nunchaks becomes emblematic of the very system that the rioters are protesting against.

Before he dies, Nunchaks throws Biscuit off the fourth floor of the building, breaking Biscuit's legs and permanently disabling him. As Biscuit's body becomes forever disfigured, a new community painfully comes together through the involvement of Frank. The novel's inclusion of Frank's story importantly links his own troubled experiences with the police as akin to those within the black community. By citing events like the 1974 Birmingham Pub bombing, after which Frank's brother was questioned "seven times" and never left alone, Wheatle manages to integrate Irish history into a narrative that would conventionally be read as formatively black British (181). While Frank is not the novel's protagonist, he intervenes to resolve its central conflict. He inhabits a crucial role in the text that illustrates the easily neglected cross-cultural connections between the characters. Through this key climatic scene, Wheatle's novel demonstrates not only the brutal violence *within* black communities but also a politics of resistance that includes both black and white working-class communities. The histories of (reverse) colonization

and imperialism between Ireland and the Caribbean become intertwined in ways that challenge notions of the frontline as necessarily separating black and white cultures.

Despite reorienting communities of resistance in the Brixton of 1981, Wheatle's text still faces the charge of narrative parochialism. The "transparent" – to revisit Procter's term – depiction of the riots and the "ghetto youths" set against the confined geography of Brixton suggests to critics that the characters occupy an excessively insular world "with temporal and spatial blinders" (Ball 226). However, embedded within the novel's didactic impulses we find the articulation of a pronounced African, or rather Afro-centric, cosmopolitanism similar to the concept outlined by Sivanandan and Chisiza in the introduction to this thesis. Wheatle proposes Africa as a generative imaginative geography that inspires outer-national alliances and affinities. Jah Nelson, the narrative's Rastafarian sage preaches this worldly perspective to the characters in the novel. In his attempts to teach Biscuit about his roots in Africa and the world outside of Brixton, Nelson tells Biscuit that "to see uder people an' different lands is an education …. 'Me eye dem are fully open now, albeit jus' de one, but it still can open liccle more" (Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* 163). Nelson explains that cultivating an edifying worldliness lies in movement and the act of travelling – *seeing* other people and places. Again, the metaphor of sight becomes important as Wheatle constructs a way for his characters (and the text in general) to move beyond the borderlands of Brixton. Though Nelson is half-blind, he is figured as the only character that can truly see Brixton's place within the larger world.

Thus, on a rhetorical and metaphorical level, the novel rejects the "temporal and spatial blinders" that have been assumed inherent to the genre of so-called urban popular fiction. By construing a narrative of transparency that thematizes sight as an

activity that fosters new (and as we found with Coffin Head and Milton) unexpected intercultural and interpersonal affinities, Wheatle offers a candid corrective to the notion that his Brixton-centric writing remains inescapably parochial. The transparent narrative mode of the novel, which critics consistently devalue, reveals previously unexamined aesthetic avenues from which to glean literary enunciations of cosmopolitanism.

Importantly, however, Nelson does not advocate the becoming of a Brixtonian *flâneur*; the knowledge of other cultures requires rootedness: "[s]o many of you yout' are ignorant an' don't know your roots," Nelson admonishes Biscuit (163). Not surprisingly, for the Rastafarian, the "ghetto youths" are fundamentally disconnected from their "African" past, which only deepens their inability to understand the systems of repression in 1980s postimperial Britain/Brixton. In what is meant to be a restorative gesture, Nelson proposes an Afro-centric cosmopolitan perspective that re-constellates the local frontlines of Brixton through the more globally-framed subversive energies within the battlegrounds of Africa and its diasporas. Nelson's educative cosmopolitan advice reaches its zenith at the end of the novel. Counselling her in ways to regain confidence, Nelson tells Denise that she comes from a history of great African leaders and revolutionaries. He references iconic figures such as Queen Nanny, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Yaa Asante of Ghana, Muhammad Ali, Nina Simone and Angela Davis. Of all these "African" figures, notably, none are connected to Britain – there is no mention of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Seacole, Learie Constantine, nor Claudia Jones, to name a few. By looking outwards to Africa, the Caribbean and the United States, Nelson eschews Britain as a discrete space of potential worldly rejuvenation for the black youths. Dawes' criticism of Wheatle's work remains slightly misjudged then in his suggestion that

Wheatle's writing remains unsure "about how to locate … [the] black British experience in the larger British world" ("Negotiating the ship" 23). With a conclusion that appears to privilege global connections over local or national affiliations, Wheatle's text remains, to some extent, uninterested in the more general black British experience or "the larger British world."

Jah Nelson's teachings poignantly encapsulate what Hall terms "the high period of Rastafarianism" which focused on "the rediscovery of and re-identification with an 'African' identity" ("Aspiration and Attitude" 40). "In that period," Hall tells us, "the notion that black people might exist in Britain who were perfectly comfortable and 'at home' with being black in Britain would have been unthinkable" (40). It is in the new moment of the 1990s that Hall suggests "black people would think of themselves as just going on being black and British" (40). The novel's insular worldview on the part of its characters identifies a discrepancy between this "emergent new culture of black Britain" that Hall puts forth in the 1990s and the "high period of Rastafarianism" in the 1970s and 1980s, since Wheatle's 1980s black "ghetto youths" "just g[o] on being black and British" (40). Here we see a clash between the parochial and the worldly, the black British and the Rastafarian. While Jah Nelson wants to situate the black youths within a tradition of black revolutionary thinking *outside* of Britain, the youths themselves remain grounded by the realties and everyday exigencies of living specifically in 1980s Brixton.

This tension uncovers the problematic racial aspects of Jah Nelson's cosmopolitanism. In his attempt to expand Denise's horizons, Nelson propounds a compelling case for a uniquely 1980s cosmopolitan worldview constellated by what he thinks to be the tribulations of the black Brixtonian youths; however, Nelson's cosmopolitanism is only accessibly through a genetic line of descent. For Nelson,

Denise should be able to cultivate outer-national identifications because of her ancestral ties to the revolutionary figures he cites: "you Denise, come from de same source, an' de same blood courses t'rough your veins" (Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* 306). This sanguine cosmopolitanism, inextricably tied to Denise's "blood" and "loins," *dis*articulates the cross-cultural alliances created in the story, particularly between the black youths and Frank (305). Nelson tries to figure here a "mosaic of unities" that is marked exclusively by genetics and race (Sivanandan 8). He remains unable to mould his Rastafarian views to the "everyday coalition-building identifications" painfully forged within the narrative of the text (Mercer 28).

In the end, the novel presents us with two conflicting conceptions of cosmopolitanism realized through distinctly discrepant ways of reimagining the 1980s. The first and most noticeable citation of cosmopolitanism comes from Jah Nelson. Through Nelson, Wheatle faithfully recaptures that "high period of Rastafarianism" Hall attributes to the 1980s. Jah Nelson becomes more than just an autobiographical addition to the plot: his edifying role in the narrative reproduces a recognizable picture of black Britain in 1981 that reifies the resistant black consciousness which came to define the "politicized edged" of the frontlines. Referencing Bob Marley's death in the final pages of the text, Wheatle betrays a somewhat itemized engagement with the past that forces outer-national connections for the characters through an exacting representation of 1981.

The second enunciation of cosmopolitanism derives from Wheatle's *creative* reimagining of the moment which reconceptualises the 1980s in novel ways; race becomes less important than class, while the frontline transforms into a more fractured, complicated and cross-cultural space of interaction. The activity of reimagining effectively enables a cosmopolitan account of the moment that is less

overtly dedicated to capturing a semblance of the historical moment, *as it was*. Wheatle incisively explains the effects of this creative cosmopolitan interactivity in his interview with Stoddart:

> I watched a documentary about the miners strike not long ago and I could relate 100 per cent to them…. When you're living in those situations, you get very narrow minded, you only look at your own area and now when I look at what was happening in Wales and the North of England, all over – the country went through a very damaging time. I wasn't so politically aware then but now *when I look back* I see it as a class issue, not a race issue. (13; my emphasis)

Wheatle explicitly delineates how hindsight can activate new sympathies and alliances that were not accessible (at least for Wheatle) within that specific historical moment. In revisiting the 1980s – even through a documentary on the miners' strike – Wheatle articulates an overt cosmopolitan engagement with history that pluralizes the past in new and unexamined ways. Reading *East of Acre Lane* through Wheatle's comments here, the novel's conflicted engagement with history is brought into focus. At one level, Wheatle attempts a "true" depiction of the past in his use of Jah Nelson and seeming appraisal of an Afro-centric resistance identity. However, through "looking back" Wheatle uncovers a more compelling account of history that is able to see beyond what would appear to be the immediate concerns embedded within 1981 Brixton. Hindsight, in Wheatle's commentary, stimulates affiliations with new communities across Britain (Wales and the North of the England) in ways that gesture towards how the text manages to transcend its seemingly confined geographic and racial parameters.

In contradistinction to what critics have suggested, *East of Acre Lane* challenges its purportedly parochial sensibilities through a complicated and nuanced reimagining of the past. For a so-called popular text such as Wheatle's to resource such explicitly outer-national and cross-cultural associations (conservatively, in the African diaspora and more creatively in Ireland), marks not only its rebellious cosmopolitan allegiances, but also an attempt to write against the easy generalizations that have come to define many critical engagements with this genre. Not despite, but rather because of its "transparent" popular form, the novel challenges the hyper-locality associated with 1980s black Britain by venturing to imagine a different future for its characters, one that closely examines black Brixton but necessarily looks beyond it into the "larger British world." It is this vital and fraught negotiation not only between the local and national, but also the global that I will explore next in relation to Linton Kwesi Johnson's Penguin Modern Classics collection *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*.

Penguinizing Dub: Paratextual Frames for Transnational Protest in Linton Kwesi Johnson's *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*

> It is impossible not to note that we never get dub poetry of the new millennium …
>
> – Kei Miller (*Writing Down the Vision* 87)

In a 1998 essay on Linton Kwesi Johnson, Caryl Phillips recounts his experience of seeing the formidable dub poet perform at the Théatre Elysée Montmartre in Paris the same year. Contemplating the cultural shifts in Britain since the 1970s and 1980s, Phillips questions the contemporary pertinence of Johnson's "politically impassioned" poetics: with "a generation who are invested in Scary Spice and Sol

Campbell as role models, what is the continued relevance of Linton Kwesi Johnson? And what on earth are the French supposed to make of him?" ("Linton Kwesi Johnson" 255). Phillips' bewilderment concerning the enduring, particularly international, appeal of Johnson's oppositional and historically situated verses is, to an extent, understandable. As Burt Caesar reminds us, "in a kind of godfather way" Johnson was integral to the development of a distinctly black British political consciousness (68-9). Motivated by the social and economic issues within south London's black British community, he joined the British version of the Black Panther Party at a young age after migrating from Jamaica to London in the late 1960s. Encouraged by John La Rose, the Trinidadian cultural activist, and politically inspired through his involvement with the Brixton-based Race Today Collective, Johnson's verses soon gave voice to local resistance movements, which sought to dismantle regimes of racism, entrenched in the institutions and everyday streets of Britain.[7]

Throughout Johnson's oeuvre, the late 1970s and early 1980s feature as a formative period that enunciates a resistant, anti-racist, anti-fascist and anti-colonial black British politics. His verses poetically figure events like the 1976/1977 Notting Hill Carnival disturbances, the 1981 New Cross Fire and subsequent Black People's March, and the 1981/1985 Brixton and Toxteth uprisings, as a means to fortify black working-class communities along the urban frontlines of Britain. Saturated with a dedicated socialist politics, his poetry and music defamiliarizes standard English through the blending of Jamaican creole alongside a trenchantly urban dialect, producing incendiary protest songs like "Fite Dem Back" (1979), an anthem against

[7] Following an ideological dispute within the Institute of Race Relations, a collective emerged in the early 1970s which severed ties with the IRR and formed the Race Today Collective. Members included Farrukh Dhondy, Leila Hassan, Darcus Howe, Gus John and Linton Kwesi Johnson.

the rise of the National Front and the authoritarian populism of Margaret Thatcher, and "Sonny's Lettah" (1979), a stirring critique of the "sus" laws voiced by a son writing to his mother from a Brixton prison. Phillips' confusion around why the French should be interested in Linton Kwesi Johnson seems appropriate then, as the majority of his work has been committed to local black British issues of the 1970s and 1980s.

While verses like "Fite Dem Back" comment upon a specific black British political landscape, these are the very lyrics that resonate with the French at Johnson's 1998 Paris concert. As Phillips tells us, the "ecstatic" and "knowledgeable" audience, anticipate these verses with "huge cheers" ("Linton Kwesi Johnson" 261). Reflecting on his popularity in France, Johnson tells Phillips that oppressive governments, racist attacks and police violence are issues that speak to a global audience. He remembers not many years ago watching bouncers in front of the Elysée Montmartre violently attack an Arab youth. The day after playing in Solingen, Germany, during the same tour in 1993, a group of neo-Nazis firebombed a Turkish home, killing many of its occupants – an act reminiscent of the 1981 New Cross fire in London. At least for Johnson, the historical and geographic specificity of his call for a black British incendiary community invites an appropriation by international audiences who remap the frontlines of black Britain onto differing, yet analogous, translocal and transnational terrains.

Yet critics have traditionally examined Johnson's verses, both musically and textually, through the ways in which they articulate a historically located and often hyper-contextualized enunciation of specifically black British political struggles

(Hitchcock 1993; D'Aguiar 1993; Procter 2003; McLeod 2004; Dawson 2007).[8] Because Johnson's poetry, in its oral and textual form, seeks to figure a politics of resistance that depends upon solidarity among black Britons and the working classes, his work has rightly been aligned with domestic efforts to fight institutional and everyday racism alongside the marginalisation of the working classes.[9] Phillips' anecdotal essay begins to challenge these frames of analysis by revealing how audiences have refigured the scope of Johnson's work, potentially unmooring the distinctive historical specificity of his verses from the boundaries of black Britain. But, as Phillips importantly realizes, the music is not the "primary appeal" ("Linton Kwesi Johnson" 256). "The basis of ... [Johnson's] support", French journalist Hélène Lee reminds him, "is his lyrics" – the poetry and the words, which have made him one of the "top conscious lyricists of reggae" (257).

In the same year that Johnson's Penguin Modern Classics collection of poetry *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* was published, Johnson conceded that his work had indeed "been moving away from being exclusively concerned with the black experience in [Britain] ... and has now taken on more of a global dimension" ("Reggae's Rabbie Burns"). We can see this globalizing shift before 2002 with the collection and album *Tings An' Times* (1991) and the album *More Time* (1998). Verses like the soon-to-be eponymous "Mi Revalueshanary Fren" (1991), which interlink the demise of Eastern European totalitarian regimes with black rights issues in South Africa, and "New Word Hawdah" (1998), which takes on the politics of international human rights in Rwanda and the massacre at the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, signal a seeming

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[8] Johnson's verses do not always articulate black solidarity, particularly in his earlier work which focuses on internecine violence and fratricidal warfare. See "Five Nights of Bleeding" in *Voices of the Living and the Dead* ([1974] 1983).

[9] A number of critics have examined Johnson's use of poetic language as primarily class-based, and have thus traced compelling alliances between his verses and the work of other working class poets such as Robert Burns and the more contemporary Scottish poet Tom Leonard. For an incisive explanation of these linguistic alliances see Wesling (1993), and Connell and Sheppard (2011).

break with Johnson's 1970s and 1980s work. The Penguin Classics collection captures the broadening scope of Johnson's verses through an articulation of these apparent epochal distinctions. In the collection, three decades of some of Johnson's most popular and polemic poetry are broken up into "seventies verse," "eighties verse" and "nineties verse." However, instead of tracing a chronological history of poetry that develops its focus from the domestic to the international, Johnson's twenty-first-century Classics text paratextually amplifies the transnational sensibilities inherent within the poetics itself. In what follows, I examine Penguin's framing of Johnson's poetry within the historically situated "eighties verse" as a means to explore the ways *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* unearths a notably meditative rhetoric of transnational protest that necessarily moves beyond black Britain. As we shall see, the editor's historical and temporal reshuffling of the poetry contained within the eighties verse coupled with the scarce yet significant paratextual frames for the collection invite a contemporary revisiting of Johnson's oppositional verses that makes possible a new hermeneutics of dissent. This reintroduction of Johnson's work to twenty-first-century readers allows fresh comparative readings of old poems in ways that demonstrate how these verses can be recontextualized in transnational ways. By reenergizing transnational and translocal alliances, Johnson's Modern Classics text enunciates a poetic cosmopolitanism that imagines new connections and attachments between resistance movements from around the world.

If reading Johnson's 1980s poetry from a twenty-first-century perspective appears anachronistic, it is because of the weighty historical significance of his protest-inflected poetry. As the British-Guyanese writer Fred D'Aguiar reminds us, especially after the 1981 riots, the New Cross fire and the subsequent march, Johnson became "the leading poet of protest in the black community" ("Have you

Been Here Long?" 59).[10] His commemoration of these galvanizing moments, through poems like "Di Great Insohreckshan" (1983) and "New Craas Massakah" (1983) alongside his political activism and community work with the Race Today Collective, established Johnson's work as "both a literary and political document": his poetry "wasn't simply a record of an event but formed a part of the history surrounding it" (57). In this sense, Johnson's verses became and remain directly connected to marginalized communities, specifically those repressed and exploited within a poetic geography of Britain that includes Brixton, Southall, Bradford, and Leeds.

Stewart Brown provocatively links the communal affinities within Johnson's work to the oral traditions of dub poetry. For Brown, the main function of the dub poet centres on protest and the "duty of the poet to voice the concerns of the community" independent of any commercialized, mainstream, or market forces that might make the poetry available to a disconnected "mass audience" ("Dub Poetry" 52). Johnson's commitment to local black British and working-class issues indeed demonstrates a conscious and active shirking of market forces in ways that ostensibly legitimize his position as "the voice of popular discontent" (52). As Johnson explained in his 2005 Arthur Ravenscroft Memorial Lecture given at the University of Leeds, the success he had earned "at the dawn of the new millennium" was harnessed through a participation in an "alternative poetry scene in Britain and Europe"; this achievement was brought about on his "own terms from a position of cultural autonomy," away "from the arbiters of British poetic taste" ("Writing

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[10] For Johnson, 1981 was "[t]he most significant date in the history of the black experience in Britain during the second half of the twentieth century" ("We Have Not Forgotten" 1). The outrage at the lack of response to the New Cross fire which ignited the Black People's Day of Action – a 20,000 strong protest march – marked a "watershed moment" (1). Johnson was an active participant in this grassroots movement and also a part of the New Cross Massacre Action Committee, which organized the march.

Reggae" 2). In a recent interview with Alex Wheatle, Johnson reiterates his conviction behind this autonomy: "I have never looked to the mainstream for recognition, I never sought validation from the British literary or British poetry establishment. I just went out there and did my own thing. I always sought validation from the communities whose experience I was writing about" (Wheatle, "A Conversation" 40).

Independent publishing venues and organizations like Towards Racial Justice, Bogle L'Overture and the political magazine *Race Today* offered Johnson a radical platform from which to disseminate his work. Even with a "mainstream" publisher like Bloodaxe Books – which retains "an inclusivist agenda and keen eye on the market share" – Johnson always ensured that his voice was mediated through politically minded publishing houses that represented, in some way, independent black poets ("Writing Reggae" 3). Through his music as well, Johnson avoided the commercialization of his verses, famously turning down a multi-album contract with the reggae label Island Records (known for making Bob Marley an international icon). He went on to start his own record label, LKJ Records, and music publishing company, LKJ Music Publishers. For three decades Johnson has defined his verses, textually and musically, through a marked desire for "cultural autonomy," a move which reveals a propensity for keeping his verses, to an extent, free from the dictates of market forces.

Being inducted under the Penguin banner as both the second living poet and the only black British poet to have work appear in the Modern Classics series consequently sets up, then, an uneasy relationship between Johnson and his 2002 collection. Because Johnson's global success paradoxically emanates from his relative commercial independence and commitment to local communities and issues,

his induction into the Classics series appears to question the foundation of his appeal, and (as Brown's argument would suggest), his purpose. Reiterating the importance of these local community links, Brown warns of the dangers of success for a dub poet, defined in terms of a "mass audience" and a "glossy book" ("Dub Poetry" 52). Success, Brown argues, ultimately *changes* and to some extent *destroys* the … impetus that gives alternative/oral/performance poetry its force in the first place"; success, by detaching the poet from his/her community, marks the "selling out" of a dub poet (51; original emphasis). As Johnson himself noted, the invitation to create a collection for Penguin made him "at once surprised and suspicious": "I wondered if it was some kind of plot to undermine my street cred" ("Writing Reggae" 3).[11] The publication of *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* through a "mainstream" publishing house that did not champion black independent writers, at least in the central way *Race Today* and Bloodaxe did, seemed to suggest a possible dilution – or "selling out" – of Johnson's radical and localized poetics, as the global, mass-market publishing structures of Penguin Books would textually transport Johnson's work outside the communities to which his verses directly speak.

Yet, while Penguin remains deeply embedded within the market-driven paradigm of publishing commerce, producing literature that is readily available and inexpensive, the publishing history underlying both Penguin and specifically its Classics series challenges Brown's assertion that a mass-produced "glossy book" necessarily equates to a "selling out." When Allan Lane wanted to make "cheap editions of good-quality contemporary writing" in the 1930s, he had in mind six-pence books – the price of ten cigarettes at that time (Jones 13). Lane, the founder of

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[11] In his 2009 interview with Wheatle, Johnson notes that he "doubt[s] very much that [he] [would] … have been published by Penguin in their Modern Classics Series if it hadn't been for the fact that [his] … editor was black" (Wheatle, "A Conversation" 39).

Penguin Books, saw the need for a new reading public after World War One that would be able to access and afford "quality contemporary writing." Lane proceeded to create Penguin Books, which specialized in paperback editions of "quality" texts, in ways that radically altered book purchasing and ownership in early twentieth-century Britain.[12] For Malcolm Bradbury this "paperback revolution," heralded by Penguin Books, effectively signalled "the endless extension" of "canonization" (8). While Penguin grew enormously throughout the century and made record profits, the company's paperback philosophy ultimately made reading so-called canonical texts increasingly accessible and affordable.

The publishing history of the Classics series in particular demonstrates Penguin's paradoxical commitment to shaping a canon of literature that remains unique in its accessible and broad appeal. After World War Two, the publisher and classicist E.V. Rieu translated Homer's *The Odyssey* as a means to create a more approachable and demotic adaptation for readers (Jones 53). Lane published Rieu's translation while offering him the chance to edit a new Penguin series called the Classics. Rieu's Odyssey subsequently sold three million copies; and since its publication, the Classics series under its many guises, such as the Modern Classics (which was introduced by Tony Godwin in 1960), has made a comprehensive range of texts, in a variety of genres, available to millions worldwide. For Penguin, the Classics umbrella administers what the editors deem to be "the very best, most provocative, exciting, groundbreaking, inspiring works," worthy of keeping for generations (*Penguin Modern Classics* 2). The Classics editions are then made affordable for global consumption and, according to Penguin's official Classics website, are kept "up to date, authoritative and readable … [while] constantly

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[12] For a comprehensive overview of Penguin's influence on the publishing industry in Britain and elsewhere see *Fifty Penguin Years* (1985).

redefining the idea of what makes a 'classic'" ("About Us"). To Penguinize a book or a collection of poetry under the Classics title inaugurates the text into a canon of definitive literature, as determined by Penguin editors, further made accessible and readable through various editorial designs, adjustments and paratexts (footnotes, prefaces, introductions).

While Johnson's *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* fits the Classics criteria as an "exciting" and "groundbreaking" text, its induction into the series proved a provocative move. In her May 4 2002 *Guardian* coverage of the collection's release, Maya Jaggi, quoting Caryl Phillips, notes that "[p]eople are *edgy* because Penguin is messing with the canon" (my emphasis). Tellingly then, on March 18 2002, one *Telegraph* headline insinuatingly read: "Reggae Radical joins Betjeman" (Moore), while on March 15 2002, in the NB section of *The Times Literary Supplement*, the diarist JC wrote that "some readers may find the ushering of Linton Kwesi Johnson into the circle of immortals [like Celan, Borges and Graves] a little premature." JC's aside to what "some readers" may think ostensibly identifies Johnson as an unlikely candidate to be Penguinized under the Classics banner. But JC's commentary also spotlights a rather important and often neglected aside; namely, that "[t]he catalogue of Penguin Modern Classics does not contain much modern poetry." At the time Johnson's collection was due to be released in May 2002, the only living poet on the list was the Polish writer Czesław Miłosz.

Instead of signalling a gesture of "selling out" on his part, Johnson saw his Classics collection as more of a "brilliant" "marketing strategy" on behalf of Penguin ("Writing Reggae" 3). Johnson, who has been an alternative poet laureate for the black British community since the 1970s, was now, more than ever, being compared to Jonathan Swift, Percy Bysshe Shelly, John Clare, Robert Burns and

James Joyce (all anti-establishment poets in their own ways). Whereas Penguin embraced the decision to include Johnson as a Modern Classics poet, it was Ellah Allfrey, his Penguin editor, who initiated the process. During our phone interview on March 27 2013, Allfrey articulated what she felt to be Johnson's lasting cultural significance, not only in Britain, but also around the world. His inclusion in the Penguin Modern Classics canon was, for Allfrey, self-evident. As the *TLS*'s JC mused, it would not be so difficult to have Joyce's "*Pomes Penyeach* in one hand" and Johnson's "*Mi Revalueshanary Fren* [another Joycean neologism] in the other."

Johnson's own philosophy behind his poetry in many ways coincides with Lane's and Rieu's conviction that books should be both readable and accessible. As Johnson told Burt Caesar in 1996:

> if I'm going to write poetry about the experiences of black people, then ordinary folk, like my mother, should be able to pick up one of my poems, read it and understand it without having been immersed in the classical tradition, the so-called Great Tradition. (72)

With an allusion to F.R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition* (1948), Johnson critiques the inaccessible and non-demotic nature of an elitist "classical tradition," which for Leavis included five writers: Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and D.H. Lawrence. A Penguin Classics text works against the notion of a classic as representative of these exclusionary reading communities. The Classics, for Penguin, creates less exclusionary than exclusive texts that are concomitantly constructed in approachable ways for a wide audience – this, at least, is Penguin's marketing line. Thus, Penguin effectively exploits the principles embedded in

Johnson's demotic writing approach: that literature should and can be accessible for all readers.

This gesture of accessibility elucidates what has become Johnson's characteristically uncertain role within purportedly classic literary traditions. One of his most cited poems "If I Woz a Tap-Natch Poet" – which features in the Classics collection but was originally released on the album *More Time* in 1998 – reflectively addresses his own uneasy position within recognized literary canons (*Mi Revalueshanary Fren* [2002] 94). In referencing a diverse range of poets and writers, from T.S. Eliot to Bongo Jerry, Johnson hovers in and around the boundaries that constitute these "tap-natch poets." The conditional position of his poetic persona – the persistently repeated "if" – enables an engagement with the canon that is always tentative, oscillating between inclusion and exclusion. As Robert McGill insightfully argues, Johnson takes advantage of "the poem's indeterminacies to make himself an elusive subject within the canonical matrix" (561): "[h]is main weapon against complicity in conservative canonization continues to be the self-conscious mobile subjectivity that 'Tap-Natch Poet' manifests, which destabilizes the canon even as it enters it" (570). Within the confines of a Penguin Classic, McGill suggests that Johnson's "mobile" subjective persona in the poem frustrates the limiting canonical implications that come with a Classics banner, since being recognized as "top-notch" by the "publishing industry" makes it difficult "to maintain" "a critical distance" (570). But this restricted engagement with Johnson's Penguinized verses, which suggests that the poetry can only resist its material enunciation in the Classics text, excludes the productive synergies between the words and the collection *as a text*, in and of itself. Johnson's accessible, anti-establishment verses, coupled with the distinctive "grey spines and evocative pictorial covers" of the Modern Classics

series, produce a collection with an "edginess" that clearly registers the anxieties of his inclusion as a "classic" (Jones 68). But these Classics verses also inspire new and provocative comparisons with poets like Robert Burns, James Joyce and even Emily Dickinson.[13] Penguin's "brilliant" "marketing strategy," in many ways, made radical protest poetry "glossy" by opening it up to new markets and literary communities outside the (black) British frame.

In order to engage carefully with the purported tensions between Johnson's politicized verses and their textual realization within the Modern Classics, it is necessary first to account for the dub poetry tradition to which these verses belong. Johnson's poetry remains intimately connected with his dub lyrics, a phrase he laid claim to in 1974.[14] For Johnson, a "'dub-lyricist' is the dj turned poet. He intones his lyrics rather than sings them. Dub-lyricism is a … form of (oral) music-poetry, wherein the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases on to the rhythm background of popular songs" (Johnson, "Jamaican Rebel Music" 398). When Johnson first conceived of the term "dub poet" or "dub lyricist" he was referring to poets like Big Youth, I Roy, U Roy, and Dillinger. At the time, Johnson preferred the term "reggae poet" for himself, since dub poetry described the poetic qualities in the work of reggae deejays that spontaneously dubbed their lyrics on to pre-recorded music. The term dub poetry soon became popularized by the Jamaican poet Oku Onuora, and began to encompass the work of Johnson, Michael Smith, Brian Meeks, and Mutabaruka, among others. In a 1989 interview with Mervyn Morris, Johnson

[13] *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* was reissued through the American publishing company Ausable Press (2006). In the introduction to the collection, contemporary American writer and poet Russell Banks discusses the significance of Johnson becoming the second living poet and the first black poet to be inaugurated into the Penguin Classics series. Since this edition is marketed to American audiences, Banks situates Johnson's poetry within an American poetic tradition that includes Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka and Michael S. Harper.

[14] Brown asserts that in 1979 Oku Onura coined the term dub poetry ("Dub Poetry" 51); Johnson also explicitly claims that he "came up with the term" in his 1989 interview with Mervyn Morris (255). While there is some dispute as to who originally coined the phrase "dub poetry," it is clear that Onura and Johnson defined and articulated it in distinctly different ways.

refined his definition of dub poetry in order to distinguish it from the work of deejays. Responding to Morris' suggestion that the term has developed a "slightly misleading" "origin," since contradictory definitions began to compete with each other in the world of both poetry and music, Johnson explained that dub poetry is poetry "within its own right": "it functions as poetry to be recited to poetry-listening audiences, something separate from the sound system tradition" (257). The music was often original and the words were never spontaneous – they were drafted and composed, "always with music in mind" (257).

The inherent musicality and orality associated with dub poetry remains for many critics the guiding force of its poetics. Dub poetry "[a]t its best," Gordon Rohlehr argues, "is the intelligent appropriation of the manipulatory techniques of the DJ for purposes of personal and communal signification" – "the Dub poem needs most to be heard" (18). "With the market for printed poetry being so small," Peter Hitchcock contends that "the dub poet must rely on live performance as the focus for the message." Relating dub poetry to protest-inflected West African oral poetic traditions, Stewart Brown, like Hitchcock, suggests that the political import of dub poetry can only be conveyed through its central function as an oral/performative piece ("Dub Poetry"). Critics have only recently begun to recognize the equally significant role textuality plays within the genre. Kwame Dawes, for instance, has attempted to recast dub poetry as a "valid *literary* form" (*Natural Mysticism* 81; my emphasis). The limitations of dub poetry definitions, for Dawes, "ha[s] to do with the actual positioning of 'dub poetry' as a subset of the reggae industry, and its critical positioning as fundamentally antithetical to 'conventional' scribal poetry" (81). Hugh Hodges has also ventured to recover the significance of the written text. Responding to Christian Habekost's argument that "[i]n print, dub poetry is out of

context," Hodges crucially argues for the value of reading Johnson's verses through their material forms, which, for Hodges, translates into a reading of the poetry through their enunciation in the *Race Today* magazine (63).

Like Dawes and Hodges, Johnson's Penguin Classics collection privileges the textual form of dub poetry. This Classics edition favours not simply the word over the music/performance, but its material representation within the collection itself. While the 2006 Ausable Press edition of *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* includes a CD (*LKJ: A Cappella Live*) of Johnson reading his poems, the Penguin Modern Classics and the later standard series Penguin collection does not. In his introduction to the Classics text, Fred D'Aguiar refers to Johnson's audiences as both "reader[s]" and "listener[s]"; however, without the inclusion of a CD, audiences of the Penguin text are figured primarily as readers (xii). Ellah Allfrey, who organized the poems in the collection, with the input of Johnson, did so without any codified or methodical approach to Johnson's performance and/or publication history. As Allfrey outlined in our telephone conversation on November 9 2013, the poems are put together in a way that enabled them to "instinctually" "speak to the moment" of each decade. Allfrey did not favour the music/performance of the poetry in her conceptualization of the collection – indeed, she notes that these two mediums are an inseparable part of Johnson's poetics. But through her decision not to include a CD, Allfrey created a collection that could "stand on its own" (November 9). The poetry, as Allfrey points out, can simply be "literature" (November 9). The subsequent literary framing of Johnson's verses, through Penguin's editorial designs, necessarily moves the poetry into the realm of the textual, even if the organization of the collection is informed by the written, musical, and performative aspects of its dub poetics.

Given the primacy granted to the textuality of Johnson's verses, we can better understand the "edgy" – to borrow a term from Phillips – tension that develops between the politics of Johnson's poems and Penguin's packaging of them. Leaving aside the questions raised by a radical socialist poet producing a text within a publishing house that primarily serves market interests alongside the irony of anti-establishment verses becoming canonized, readers of *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* encounter a Classics text that has few paratextual elements. As D'Aguiar tells us in the introduction: "[w]e are lucky to have [Johnson's poems] … collected here for us to quote and memorize" (xiv). Yet, in the collection there is no sign(ature) of an editor. The first page of the text features a short biography of both Johnson and D'Aguiar. What follows is a table of contents and D'Aguiar's introduction constructed as one kind of reader's response to Johnson's work. Johnson's poems are then split up into three sections: "Five Nights of Bleeding – Seventies Verse," "Mi Revalueshanary Fren – Eighties Verse," and "New Word Hawdah – Nineties Verse." It is not unusual for an editor to remain anonymous on a Penguin Classics text; however, since the poems have gone through a clear selection process, which has determined their place within each decade, the collection begs more paratextual information. For instance, poems are not given their original place and date of publication (the reader must find out which collection or album a selected poem comes from), and some poems are even placed in an anachronistic order, as with the title poem "Mi Revalueshanary Fren," which was first published in written form in 1991 but appears in the eighties verse. The few paratextual additions offered by the collection are the footnotes that feature throughout the text which are meant to explicate particular contexts related to each specific poem. By way of example, the notes for "Five Nights of Bleeding" explain not only to whom the poem is dedicated

– Leroy Harris "[a] victim of internecine violence" – but also detail the poem's reference to "shepherd's" – "[a] Railton Road Methodist Youth Club, named after the first leader" – and "the rainbow" – "[a] former music venue in Finsbury Park, London" (6-7). The notes at times conflict with the content of the poetry as it does for instance in "New Craas Massakah," a eulogy for the fourteen black youths who died in the 1981 New Cross fire. Just below the title of the poem, a note proffers the details of the fire: "a racially motivated arson attack at Yvonne Ruddock's sixteenth birthday party on 18 January 1981, which resulted in the deaths of fourteen young blacks with twenty-six seriously injured" (54). Because the poem's speaker directly addresses the reader by provoking "yu" to "remembah" the addition of the note introduces two different addressees – the first who is aware of the context and is incensed to remember the "wicked prapahghanda" from the government and the police, and the second who is unaware of the event and should remember (55).

These footnotes, which are imprinted on to the bottom space of the poems in the collection, constitute a form of translation or "dubbing over" by Penguin in order to make Johnson's poetry accessible to a wide range of readers. This process, which I term "Penguinizing dub," provokes new interpretive avenues that mark the ways Johnson's Modern Classics collection becomes reframed, or re-dubbed, for different audiences through the paratextual messages, or lack thereof, inscribed by and within the Penguin edition. Penguinizing dub is a term that brings to the fore the tensions between the seemingly local and always political aspects of Johnson's dub poetry and the market concerns of a publishing house keen on making the artistic impetus of these politics accessible outside its local frame. Distinguishing *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* as a collection that Penguinizes dub enables an explicit discussion of new thresholds of interpretation broached by the refigured textuality of

Johnson's verses. To read Johnson's poetics in paratextual ways is to acknowledge the much-neglected literary quality of his verses that are, in this instance, framed by the signs of a Penguin logo. The term Penguinizing dub effectively flags the significant ways in which the Modern Classics series indelibly marks and transforms the dynamics of dub poetry.

Within the confines of the Penguin collection, Johnson's authorial presence, like his poetic persona in "If I Woz a Tap-Natch Poet," remains notably "elusive." Here, a paratextually-based comparison with Czesław Miłosz's Modern Classics text offers a productive insight into the abiding significance of Johnson's distant textual presence. As previously mentioned, the Polish writer was the first living poet to be inducted into the Modern Classics series with his non-fiction book *The Captive Mind* (2001). In 2005, a collection of his poetry entitled *New and Collected Poems 1931-2001* was reprinted as a Modern Classic (it was originally published by HarperCollins in 2001). Miłosz died in 2004, but his self-penned introduction from earlier editions was kept in the Modern Classics version. Miłosz also wrote the endnotes to his collection, which detail specific circumstances pertaining to each poem, for instance, a special side note, definition, or a particular poem's fraught publication history. We know that Miłosz has written these endnotes because he writes them in the first person. By contrast, throughout *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, Johnson's authorial presence seems to be almost entirely absent. Besides his name on the front and back cover, and a dedication that reads "To my mother," readers find no overt sign of Johnson's influence in the shaping of his collection. While Miłosz explicitly represents himself within the paratexts of his Penguin collection, Johnson appears to be conspicuously effaced from his.

This seemingly self-conscious lack of authorial presence paratextually challenges Brown's contention that dub poetry remains necessarily an art form connected to an exclusive and localized community of protest. By appearing to distance himself from his Penguin Classics text, Johnson occupies a detached position from his work that, to my mind, exposes and opens up new ways in which to (re)read sections of his Penguinized verses in a more translocal, transnational and cosmopolitan frame. As Gérard Genette reminds us, the configuration of paratextual elements, such as titles, footnotes, and signs of authorship, signal "the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its reader, and more generally to the public" (261). We can read *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* therefore as an updated twenty-first-century collection of poetry that "proposes itself," anew, without any overt direction from its author. Since Johnson's poems are decontextualized from their place and date of publication and, to some extent, reshuffled within three distinct decades, they warrant renewed readings of his poetry framed through the paratextual signs of a Modern Classic: the grey spine, the evocative yet simple cover, the Penguin logo. Even without the name of an editor, an implicit argument is enunciated for each decade of representative poetry as the collection paratextually re-historicizes Johnson's poetics.

In what follows, I read two "eighties" poems against each other as a means to trace how Johnson's Penguinized verses refigure protest conventionally limited to 1980s black Britain in implicitly transnational ways. A comparative reading of "Di Great Insohreckshan" (1983) and "Mi Revalueshanary Fren" (1991) – two poems addressing protests, riots and revolutions – translocally re-contextualizes the 1981 Brixton uprisings in relation to a more meditative rhetoric of insurrection grounded in a specifically post-Cold War dispensation. The significance of this comparison

lies in the way Johnson's Penguin collection brings together these two poems within the same decade to encourage a (re)reading of a local uprising through the lens of a global enunciation of resistance. By (re)reading "Di Great Insohreckshan," which originally appeared on the album *Making History*, against "Mi Revalueshanary Fren," which was published eight years later in the collection and album *Tings An' Times*, we can glean a poetics that destabilizes Johnson's work as strictly local, located, and resolutely oppositional, particularly in terms of its dissident politics.

The first two lines of "Di Great Insohreckshan" register the exact date and location of the poem: "april nineteen eighty wan / doun inna di ghetto af Brixtan" (60). This opening establishes Johnson's verse as a poetic narrative that celebrates and commemorates the 1981 Brixton riots as an "historical occayshan" (60). An adversarial rhetoric becomes enunciated throughout the poem as the uprising is figured in terms of "vanquish" and "victri" "powah" and "glory" (60). In order to combat the brutally oppressive stop-and-search tactics of the Brixton police, the violence of the "rebel[s]" functions only as a means to perform symbolically laden anti-racist acts. As the speaker of the poem is keen to point out, the "rebel[s]" "bun dung di George," a public house in Brixton viewed as racist, but did not "bun di lanlaad" (61). Here insurrection becomes politically and ethically valiant. Johnson's characteristic use of the anaphoric "wi" reiterates a collective consciousness provoked by the poetry that gives voice to the uprising as a revolutionary protest and community-making moment. However, the conspicuous absence of the speaker from the event marks a tenuous tension between the confident oppositional "wi" – which establishes a clear frontline against "dem" (the police and the state) – and the latent uncertainty embedded within the poetic "I." Against the immediacy compelled by these protest inflected verses, the speaker reminds us that "it woz event af di year /

an I wish I ad been dere" (60). The enunciation of the poetic "I" signals, on the one hand, an imaginative connection with the "wi" in the poem; yet, it also flags an important disconnect between the speaker and the poetic articulation of the event. This is a protest verse constructed from a removed and dislocated position.

The distance between the speaker and the event becomes the subject of scrutiny in "Mi Revalueshanary Fren," a 1991 poem that introduces a more reflective tone into the "eighties verse" in ways that revalue the necessarily oppositional and seemingly immovable boundaries of revolutionary frontlines. Unlike "Di Great Insohreckshan," "Mi Revalueshanary Fren" does not begin with a clear time and location, but rather initiates a conversation between the speaker and his "revalueshanary fren." The speaker tells us that his "fren" has not been the same since the uprisings in Eastern Europe that have seen communist totalitarian regimes fall from Poland to Bulgaria. The footnotes in the text remind the reader that Johnson is making a direct link between the disintegration of totalitarian communism in Eastern Europe and issues of international black rights. By correlating the dismantling of apartheid and black liberation movements with the fall of repressive regimes in Eastern Europe, the poem – in its Penguinized proximity to the "Di Great Insohreckshan" – draws a tacit link between the incendiary actions of the Brixton rioters alongside other international resistance movements. The Brixton uprisings, which confronted the populist authoritarianism of Thatcher and a postimperial police force, become suggestively re-contextualized through the political struggles in Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania and South Africa.

This latent transnational connection between the poems captures an understanding of revolution through what Bruce Robbins has aptly defined as an "actually existing cosmopolitanism," a term which describes "a reality of

(re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" ("Introduction" 3).

The paratextual conditions of Johnson's collection, which bring these two poems

together for the first time in the same decade, textually provokes inter-poetic

attachments between Brixton, Eastern Europe and South Africa. The multifarious

connections that draw together the various revolutions within "Mi Revalueshanary

Fren" – connections made explicit by the background provided in the footnotes –

become an expression of the ways in which the context of one poetic line extends

and attaches itself on to another. As the eponymous poem in the collection, "Mi

Revalueshanary Fren" carries a certain weight in the text that impels a meta-textual

consideration of such linkages and shifts in contexts. Revolution as revaluation

marks the collection's cosmopolitical dispensation in that it offers a more critically

transnational interpretive frame from which to (re)read the poems in the text.

Johnson's Modern Classics collection thus remains more interested in paratextually

reconsidering new translocal attachments amongst the verses, than in ossifying the

contextual distinctions between the poems or any one specific articulation of

revolution, uprising or protest.

In light of the poem's critical cosmopolitical frame, the so-called frontlines in

"Mi Revalueshanary Fren" remain consciously blurred alongside any firm

understanding of the term revolution. This is reflected in the poem's uneven lyrical

conversation: while the first speaker offers a rhythmically patient and complex

meditation on the consequences and causes of revolutions, the "revalueshanary

fren," in contradistinction, responds in truncated jingoistic terms that thematically

echo the valiant characterization of revolution in "Di Great Insohreckshan." The

ensuing "conversation" becomes marked not only by a rhythmic disagreement, but

also a contextual one as the speaker never fully concurs with, nor comprehends, his

"fren's" argument that the Eastern European communist leaders all "ad to go," "just like apartied / will av to go" (67). He remains uncertain throughout the poem and fundamentally unsure of his own position. As he explains:

it getting aadah by di day
fi know whe yu stan
cauz wen yu tink yu deh pan salid dry lan
wen yu tek a stack yu fine yu inna quick-san
yu notice how di landscape a shif
is like valcanoe andah it an notn cyan stap it
cauz tings jusa bubble an a bwoil down below
strata separate an refole
an wen yu tink yu reach di mountain tap
is a bran-new platow yu goh buck-up (68)

Here, it is the speaker who revalues the "fren's" oppositional verses. The instability of the figurative tectonic plates articulate the shifting territorial attachments of the speaker; since he cannot firmly "know whe [he] … stan," he begins to question the bold and confident revolutionary rhetoric espoused by his "fren." If the activity of cosmopolitanism, according to Robbins, identifies differing intensities of attachment, then the speaker's recourse to a geographic language (which physically de- and re-attaches him to the landscape) provocatively maps a shifting transnational and cosmopolitan sensibility that makes a nonsense of any clear boundaries or borders connected to a fixed political position. Because this cartographic metaphor remains unlinked to any identifiable landscape, it offers the collection a pertinent meta-textual metaphor that invites readers to entangle the different contexts and geographic regions delineated within each representative decade. Read in relation to

the materiality of the Penguin text, the speaker's words demonstrate an uncanny awareness of the shifting (con)textual ground that these verses come to encapsulate.

This new material form of Johnson's poetry necessarily creates a "cornucopia[a]" of "new meanings" and interpretations, to borrow a phrase from D.F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (30; 20). Penguin, through its editorial decisions and designs, has created a novel (and literary) form for Johnson's verses that pluralizes the ways in which we have conventionally read his poetry, particularly as a text. Robbins's enunciation of cosmopolitanism as an "attachment [or (re)attachment] at a distance" demonstrates how Johnson's Modern Classics collection flexibly unfetters the verses from their local and historical contexts by creating paratextually-framed attachments between different geographic regions, historical moments and forms of protest. While Johnson's verses are disconnected from any detailed description of their inception, his Classics text forges a critically poetic cosmopolitanism negotiated through the interpretive prompts offered to the reader. Instead of depoliticizing his work as Stewart Brown might suggest, Penguin's decontextualization offers new, transnationally inspired re-engagements with the verses. Johnson's poetry no longer becomes "exclusive to the experience" of the local communities that it was meant to represent (Brown, "Dub Poetry" 53); rather, because of the ways in which the collection indelibly Penguinizes his dub poetics, the verses themselves unveil a "cornucopi[a]" of meanings and implications (30). Like the French audience at the Théatre Elysée Montmartre, contemporary readers are also invited to reignite and revalue Johnson's dissident poetry in distinctly translocal and transnational ways.

Such a revaluation of Johnson's work remains deeply entrenched within a refigured reading of the 1980s that challenges any singular or cohesive

representation of this formative historical moment. Within the Penguin Modern Classic frame, Johnson's poetry provokes comparative readings that expand, and to some degree temper, a specifically local, black British politics on to a more globalized, transnational terrain – put simply, because of his Classics text, we can no longer read Johnson's iconic "eighties verses" in the same way. This paratextual remoulding of the 1980s enables new poetic "coalition-building identifications" (of the kind we saw in Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane*) that provocatively entangle translocal revolutionary moments and protests from around the world (Mercer 28). Far from compromising the politics behind his dub poetics, Johnson's Modern Classics edition reshuffles his poetry in ways that inaugurate fresh avenues for realizing the enduring, twenty-first century, complexity of his verses. This Classics text crucially calls into question Kei Miller's recent allegation that, in the new millennium, dub poetry has simply died. Noting how Johnson often "divides his dub poems into three decades," Miller suggests that it is "as if even the poet laureate of the movement locates the genre in a time that has past – as if even he is aware of the genre's death" (*Writing Down the Vision* 87). As I have argued, the iteration of Johnson's dub poetry within the Modern Classics series updates and reconstitutes the poetry as a text in and of itself. Dub poetry did not die in the twenty-first century; instead, through its material rearticulation, it has sanctioned novel modes of reading dub as a literary genre that moves beyond an exclusively determined "poetics of sound and fury" (Miller, *Writing Down the Vision* 87). *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* becomes, then, a uniquely twenty-first-century collection that examines the malleable (and paratextual) relationship between politics and poetics – the collection, in its Penguinized form, proffers less "sound and fury" and more reticence and meditation. This questioning mode of engaging with the past facilitates a reflective

revisiting of 1980s black Britain in ways that negotiates (as we shall see next in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*) a cosmopolitical reimagining of the moment.

Vicariously Thatcher: Questioning Critical Cosmopolitanism in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

> If you live totally isolated and alone like Diogenes in the tub, maybe it does not mind (sic) but the moment you live in a community, you have got to have some rules by which to live.
>
> There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.... There is no such thing as society.
>
> – Margaret Thatcher ("Interview for *Women's Own*")

Aptly published at the turn of the century, Zadie Smith's garrulous and busy debut novel *White Teeth* continues to provoke critical debate, from the merits of her precocious writing style (Wood) to the dubious marketing strategies of Britain's "cover girl of the 'Multicultural Novel'" (Thomas).[15] But as *White Teeth*'s contemporaneity diminishes, the terms of contention surrounding the novel are

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[15] As one of *White Teeth's* most vocal critics, James Wood has argued that Smith's first novel perpetuates the emptiness of a specific contemporary writing aesthetic that borrows from the "conventions of realism" only to "exhaus[t]" and "overwor[k]" them (41). Wood describes this mode of narration as a "hysterical realism," which writers like Smith, Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and David Foster Wallace enact by offering "an excess" and "endless web" of stories at the expense of the humanity of the characters (42). Reflecting on the "hysterical" aspects of Smith's writing, Susie Thomas questions the marketing tactics surrounding *White Teeth* that have enabled Smith to become "a contemporary icon" while eliding the literary antecedents of her work, most notably Hanif Kureishi. Thomas argues that the "lavish" promotion of Smith's novel, which included Hamish Hamilton's £250,000 advance from only a hundred pages of completed text, misleadingly placed *White Teeth* alongside the works of Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan and Martin Amis in ways that bolstered the "undemanding multiculturalism" of the novel; the exaltation of Smith's canonical brilliance "obscur[e]d" her "real debt" to writers like Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Caryl Phillips and David Dabydeen (Thomas).

beginning to shift away from the national language of multiculturalism towards the more locally and globally inflected terminology of cosmopolitanism. The humorous machinations of "everyday hybridity" (Moss 15) in Smith's narrative, which entangles the intergenerational lives of three diverse families – the Bangladeshi Iqbals, the Jamaican and English Joneses, and the Jewish-British Chalfens – has concentrated debates concerning the novel around Smith's satiric portrayal of a "Happy Multicultural Land" (Smith, *White Teeth* 465). Critics have registered a range of assessments concerning the novel's representation of multiculturalism, from its cautious celebration (Head 2003; McLeod 2004) to a critique of its material failures (Gunning 2010; Thompson 2005). Smith's eclectic engagement with the politics and aesthetics of British multiculturalism has, as Claire Squires suggests, given the novel its so-called "energy" (75), invigorating debates surrounding the text which examine, on the one hand, how *White Teeth* advances a multicultural model of interaction which "balances inclusiveness with the articulation of otherness and difference" (Bentley 497) while critiquing that very model for "its tolerance of racism and exclusion" (Gunning, *Race and Antiracism* 132).

Much of this critical "energy" surrounding *White Teeth* remains condensed within a national frame of analysis that sees the text as writing to, or against, the management of transcultural exchange within the domain of Britain and Englishness. While the discussion concerning British multiculturalism and *White Teeth* has by no means been exhausted, it is my view that this national focus is beginning to translate itself onto debates of what Paul Jay, borrowing from Walter Mignolo, has called a "critical cosmopolitanism"; the "critical" here recalibrates cosmopolitanism through an attention to the local and global consequences of colonial and imperial history. While the characters in *White Teeth* are grounded in the "politics of contemporary

British multiculturalism" they concomitantly exist in the "cultural demographics of a cosmopolitan London" (Jay 59). In other words, they are also part of the interlocking local and global flows of colonization and globalization, which mitigate the management of diversity in conflictingly new and multiple ways.

Building on the novel's representation of multiculturalism, a number of critics have begun to modify the terms of debate by examining how *White Teeth* articulates specific forms or conceptions of cosmopolitanism. Rather than reiterating an exclusive focus on Britain, these critics explore the ways Smith's text imagines itself existing within and against the world. In a rather scathing critique of *White Teeth*, Padmaja Challakere argues that Smith appropriates the "metaphorizing mode of neoliberal capitalism" in ways that demonstrate the conservatism of contemporary cosmopolitan political subjectivity. In following the trope of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Challakere sees the "trendy" and "cheerful" multiculturalism of *White Teeth* as obscuring the violent material realities encoded within the new walls of neoliberal globalization. In contrast, Christine W. Sizemore rejects the notion that the novel offers up "any concept of consumerism or easy multiculturalism" (71). Instead Sizemore traces what she calls the demotic cosmopolitanism of *White Teeth*, which takes its form in the local geography of the novel's setting: Willesden, North London. The "ordinary places, nondescript churches, gardens, and walkways where local inhabitants meet each other" become representative of "mutual appreciation, friendship and a new understanding of English identity" (67).

Strikingly, whether Smith's text is championed as articulating a progressive cosmopolitan position, or derided for its complicity within a conservative, neoliberal cosmopolitan frame, each critic in one way or another has hinged their discussion on Samad Iqbal, the Bangladeshi protagonist of *White Teeth*. For Katina Rogers, Samad

encapsulates the most patriotic sentiments in the text and thus functions as a critique

of characters that idealize hybridity and ahistorical notions of cosmopolitanism (like

the Chalfens, Poppy Burt-Jones, and the Glenard Oak headmaster). While Sizemore

counter-intuitively reads Samad as representing a "new identity of difference and

tolerance" (75), Challakere disagrees, deeming Samad a "raving misfit" in the

novel's attempt to create a superficially "barrier free world." Samad's character has

become the analytical nucleus from which critics determine where to place the

novel's textual negotiation of cosmopolitanism. As the critical "energy" of *White

Teeth* increasingly converges upon Samad, I want to dwell on the relationship

between the novel's purported enunciation of cosmopolitanism and a character

deemed to be at once, "sinister" (Jay), "patriotic" (Rogers), and a "misfit"

(Challakere). As ostensibly one of the more problematic figures in the novel, why

has Samad become so pivotal in critical discussions of cosmopolitanism?

In order to clarify the terms of this question, it is necessary to deviate for a

moment to examine the limits of Mignolo's notion of critical cosmopolitanism

which, I argue, serves as one of the key structural lenses through which critics assess

White Teeth's cosmopolitan merits. For Jay, we can trace the critical

cosmopolitanism of *White Teeth* in the ways the novel "historicizes the politics of

contemporary British multiculturalism by linking them to the histories of colonialism

and globalization" (159). This becomes evident in the novel's insistence on

accounting for the historicity of its multicultural cast. In the case of the Bowdens, the

reader becomes a "silent witness" to the "bad blood" (Smith, *White Teeth* 356) of the

Bowden family by following the Russian doll narrative of the maternal line: from

Ambrosia Bowden, impregnated by an English Captain and nearly abused by Sir

Edmund Flecker Glenard (of which Glenard Oak school becomes his namesake) in

early twentieth-century Jamaica, to her daughter Hortense who with their conversion as Jehovah's Witnesses migrates to England in 1972, to Clara who denies religion and marries the "[g]ood honest English stock" that is Archibald Jones, then to Irie, their mixed-race daughter, who nervously exists in the novel's multicultural present (100). The legacies of slavery and oppression, which in effect impregnate Ambrosia, come to burden Irie who attempts to rid herself of these "tortuous" "roots" (527).

Tracing the colonial and imperial history of cosmopolitanism, Mignolo also systematically delineates a series of embedded narratives of what he calls "coloniality" that have shaped the term. Since the sixteenth century and from the purview of Spanish, Portuguese, British, French and German colonialism, Mignolo historicizes the development of oppressive "cosmopolitan designs" that have legitimized hegemonic practices of colonial domination, or forms of cosmopolitanism from above (745). Critical cosmopolitanism reverses this top-down approach and becomes formulated through "colonial difference" as opposed to domination (724). "One of the tasks of critical cosmopolitanism," Mignolo tells us, "is precisely clearing up the encumbrances of the past" (736). Mignolo's sense of the term critical is meant to offer a much-needed historicization of cosmopolitanism, and through this, a means to unburden the term from past problematic "cosmopolitan designs." The result is a critical cosmopolitanism that "transform[s]" "the hegemonic imaginary from the perspective of people in subaltern positions" (736-37) – "subaltern" taking on the meaning here "not [of] inferiority but awareness of a subaltern position in a current geopolitical distribution of power" (745). This cosmopolitanism from below attempts to account for a history of oppression associated with the notion of cosmopolitanism while simultaneously disentangling this history for a contemporary reconsideration of the term. Critical cosmopolitanism

becomes then a way in which to construct, and reclaim, a liberatory and politically progressive "set of projects" that contribute to a "planetary" consciousness from the margins (721).

Critics have gauged the analytical prowess of *White Teeth*'s cosmopolitanism in much the same way as Mignolo defends critical cosmopolitanism. *White Teeth* is deemed to offer a critique of cosmopolitanism to the extent that the novel, or its characters, fail to address the continuing historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism (Rogers; Challakere). Likewise, the novel is celebrated as enunciating a critical cosmopolitanism if these histories, once addressed, can be overcome or unencumbered in the world of the novel's multicultural and cosmopolitan present (Jay; Sizemore). Yet, the paradox of redressing historical legacies of colonialism as a means to transcend the entanglements that these legacies produce reveal the questionable assumptions within Mignolo's notion of critical cosmopolitanism: firstly, that a cosmopolitanism which has been constructed through "coloniality" *can* unencumber itself to become anew, and secondly, that this un-encumbrance is desirable.

Samad Iqbal remains central in this discussion because it is his character that both responds to and troubles the question of what happens to cosmopolitanism when it cannot unencumber itself from the past and rearticulate itself from an uncomplicated "subaltern position." The interpretive activity required in Mignolo's critical cosmopolitanism – the act of accounting for a problematic past while disavowing or unencumbering it in order to construct something new, and perhaps liberatory, from the margins – becomes challenged and inverted through the ways Samad becomes embedded within the historical narrative of the novel. The significance of Smith's construction of Samad to discussions of cosmopolitanism in

White Teeth is founded in the ways he distinctly fails to develop a sense of critical cosmopolitanism. As a Bangladeshi Muslim, who fought for Britain during WWII, then migrated to London in 1973, Samad occupies an arguably "subaltern" position in the novel. His obsession with redressing the neglected history of his great-grandfather Mangal Pande, a Bengal sepoy who led a failed mutiny against the British East India Company in 1857, alongside his insistence on the corrupting and dominating force of England and her "*Western education system*" mark Samad against the novel's represented hegemonic spheres of power (Smith, *White Teeth* 127). Samad's awareness of his supposed "subaltern" position provokes an alliance of resistance between himself and his great-grandfather: "[i]f it wasn't for this buggery hand," Samad tells the soldiers stationed with him in Bulgaria, "I would have matched his achievements" (87). That Samad wants to avenge the diminished position of his great-grandfather and re-enact the rebellious potential of the mutiny, not only exposes his perception of his own "subalternity," but also the obscurity of his alliances, since he claims this anti-colonial stance while fighting a war for the very country that provoked the rebellion in the first place. Yet, even from this complex, even complicit, "subaltern perspective," Samad shirks from constructing a critical cosmopolitanism – a world-view that meaningfully challenges the hegemonic and epistemic structures which have relegated his great-grandfather's role in the Indian Rebellion to a caption in the last surviving copy of a "heavy, many paged book" (258). Instead, Samad remains collusive with the very structures that contribute to his seeming "subaltern" position. He does not frustrate the possibility of a critical cosmopolitanism in *White Teeth*; but rather, by failing to offer a cosmopolitanism from below, Samad reminds us that unencumbering colonial history from any progressive sense of cosmopolitanism remains, at best, difficult. As

White Teeth's "subaltern" migrant figure, Samad's character complicates the notion that a "subaltern" position, in Mignolo's sense of the term, necessarily inspires a transformation of hegemonic imaginaries. The "sinister" and "misfit" qualities of Samad challenge and mark the limits of the boundaries between the "subaltern" and the "hegemonic" in critical cosmopolitanism.

Because *White Teeth* both structurally and contextually presents itself as a novel in many ways obsessed with history, it is no coincidence that Samad features in the chapter within the historical parameters of "1984, 1857." Most obviously, Samad's chapter spotlights his own encumbrance with colonial history, specifically the unsuccessful mutiny of his great-grandfather in 1857. 1984 nicely packages the two dates as it marks the year the Indian government issued a postage stamp to commemorate Pande (a historical fact curiously unmentioned in the novel). While *White Teeth* seems to be acutely aware of history, as the narrator intrusively dates almost all the events in the novel, Samad's chapter notably ignores much of the historical context of 1980s Britain. The chapter engages with a select number of historical events, such as the Great Storm of 1987, the Rushdie affair, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and a slight reference to the Falklands War; however, it does this without any significant reference to Margaret Thatcher, the miners' strikes of 1984, or the inner-city riots of the early 1980s. Instead, "all the shit of the eighties" is neatly tied up and imbued in one sentence: "Irish bombs, English riots, transatlantic stalemates" (216). Reflecting on her youth at the time of writing the novel, Smith confesses that she "was perfectly equipped to write the kind of fiction [she] … wr[o]te: saturated by other books; touched by the world, but only vicariously" (Thomas). The distance between Samad and the important specificities of the 1980s world in which he anxiously exists might suggest a certain level of disconnect

between Samad and his context, producing a character that, as James Wood has argued, "is, precisely, a caricature more than a character" (43). However, *White Teeth*'s insistence on indelibly marking the characters within specific time periods, evidenced by the dated parameters in the upper left corner of each page, courts a more subtle reading that tempts a reanimation of the characters by reading them back into the historical moments only "touched" upon by Smith's jejune narrator. In what follows, I argue that re-embedding Samad within the historical context of the 1980s, an act invited by the historical timeline of his chapter, enables a historicization of his "sinister" and "misfit" qualities. Samad's failure to create a critical cosmopolitanism becomes refracted precisely through his engagement with Thatcher's 1980s Britain and those unmentioned and merely "touched" historical moments in the novel. The limits of critical cosmopolitanism reveal themselves in the ways Samad vicariously stands in *as* Thatcher in the text. If Samad represents a "subaltern" position whose history and past has been enunciated outside the hegemonic systems of power, then his collusion with the anti-immigration, anti-European, anti-riot sentiments of Thatcher's new right discourse ironically mocks the process of a "subaltern" figure constructing a progressive cosmopolitanism.

In her infamous 1978 interview with the television series *World in Action*, Margaret Thatcher, then Conservative Party leader, articulated her thoughts on immigration:

> there was a committee which looked at it and said that if we went on as we are then by the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much

throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in…. You see, my great fear is now that if we get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and we shall not have good race relations with those who are here. Every one (sic) who is here must be treated equally under the law and that, I think, is why quite a lot of them too are fearful that their position might be put in jeopardy or people might be hostile to them unless we cut down the incoming numbers. They are here. They are here. They must be treated equally. ("TV Interview for Granada")

Thatcher's commentary deftly restructured the right-wing discourse of the Conservative Party by constructing a new consensus away from the so-called socialism of the postwar period and toward a rhetorically moderated extremism closer to Enoch Powell's insidious populism. Powell's demonization of black immigration, most famous in his polemic 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, created, as Anna Marie Smith suggests, "an important precedent" for Thatcher (179). Her affable tone effected through the measured use of adverbs like "rather" and "quite" allowed Thatcher to appropriate Powell's views on race and immigration "as a sensible and mainstream position" (179). Thatcher was not only able to lure Powellian supporters for the upcoming national election, but also sections of National Front voters, who as Thatcher claims, "are falsely accused of racial prejudice" ("TV Interview with Granada"). As she tells her interviewer: "In my view that is one thing that is driving some people to the National Front. They do not agree with [their] objectives … but they say that at least they are talking about some of the problems. If we do not want people to go to extremes, and I do not, we ourselves must talk about this problem" ("TV Interview with Granada").[16]

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[16] As Anna Marie Smith goes on to detail, Powell's populism was extremely ambiguous. One the one hand, his isolation and exclusion from the Conservative cabinet "heightened the popular sense that the party was extremely out of touch with 'the people'" (178). Yet, Powell's inability to take advantage

Yet, this interview demonstrates a balancing act far more sophisticated than a mere tempering of racist and extremist views. While Thatcher politely draws on a Powellian rhetoric that plays on the fear that migrants will overtake and "swamp" Britain, she concomitantly opens up a rhetorical space for those very migrants in her comments. Under the guise of maintaining equality, Thatcher makes sure to include "them" in the new consensus. Migrants must too be fearful of the "swamping" of other migrants since their minority "position might be put in jeopardy." Through this subtle threat and concurrent gesture of inclusion, Thatcher interlocks a paradoxical and "sinister" alliance between migrants – who "are here" – and her Conservative Party. Thatcher's use of the third-person pronoun "They" serves to both distance the migrant, "those who are [already] here," from the national British community of "we," while inviting "them" – the outsider migrant protected under British law – to participate in the same Thatcherite discourse that excludes them.[17]

Samad becomes caught within this vexed alliance, as he takes up Thatcher's rhetorical invitation by vicariously echoing many of her views. We can see this in the way the novel represents the fall of the Berlin Wall and Samad's subsequent response. As the television reporter announces: "The 28-mile-long scar the ugliest symbol of a divided world, East and West – has no meaning any more…. last night, at the stroke of midnight, thousands lingering both sides of the wall gave a great roar and began to pour through checkpoints and to climb up and over it" (Smith, *White*

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of his supporters, which included backbench MPs, businessmen and constituency activists, revealed his failure to mobilize "his populist strategy of speaking directly to the electorate" into a more sustainable mainstream position (178). Thatcher was able to tap into the connection between "the people" and Powell. As Smith points out, she "was far more effective in representing her racist views as the moderate position which stood between extremist demands from both the right and the left" (179). See Smith's chapter: "Powellism: the black immigrant as the post-colonial symptom and the phantasmatic re-closure of the British nation" (1994).

[17] Thatcher's iteration of support for migrants in her 1978 speech was particularly poignant (and deceiving) given the subsequent passing of the 1981 British Nationality Act which removed the citizenship rights of various categories of colonial and ex-colonials, many of which were living "here" in Britain.

Teeth 240). This moment is particularly useful in examining the novel's enunciation

of cosmopolitanism, since, as Robert Fine reminds us, the fall of the wall "offers a

compelling image of the breakdown of boundaries maintained by force and of the re-

opening of suppressed forms of human contact" (1). These new and renewed forms

of human contact have imbued the physical fall of the Berlin Wall as a major symbol

and starting point for contemporary discussions of globalization and

cosmopolitanism – a point that will be taken up in more detail in chapter three

(Friedman 2005; Fine 2007; Schoene 2009).[18] Challakere, via Peter Gowan, suggests

that *White Teeth* re-enacts the fall of the wall as a means to mimic a conservative

neoliberal cosmopolitanism from above, where the flattening of the wall represents

the novel's construction of a "barrier-free world." However, if we read the novel's

representation of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and Samad's reaction to it, back

into the cultural politics of 1980s Britain, a different picture begins to emerge, as the

narrator distinctly prevents this moment from becoming a dramatic enactment of an

optimistic cosmopolitanism through which "a divided world" defiantly "roar[s]" and

comes together. The narrator mocks the hyperbolic breakdown of borders on the

television screen by revealing not only Irie's naïve *Newsnight* worldview – "[t]hat

after years under the dark cloud of Eastern communism [the East Berliners are]

coming into the light of Western democracy" (Smith, *White Teeth* 239) – but also the

reporter's use of Thatcher's aquatic metaphor of "swamping" as the thousands of

Germans on both sides of the wall "pour" through the checkpoints. The novel

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[18] Thomas Friedman, in his polemic study *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (2005), tells us that "the second great age of globalization and the second great age of unregulated democracy began on 11/9 with the collapse of the Berlin Wall" (9). In his book *Cosmopolitanism* (2007), Robert Fine maintains the globalizing significance of the fall of the wall while attempting to steer away from the neoliberal politics of Friedman. Fine sees the fall of the wall as signaling the start of current discussions of "new cosmopolitanism" as "[t]he event appropriately marked the emergence of a new intellectual and political movement that is itself international and places human rights, international law, global governance and peaceful relations between states at the centre of its vision of the world" (1). Following Fine, Berthold Schoene in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009) reiterates the claim that "contemporary cosmopolitanism takes its beginnings in 1989" (7).

satirizes any kind of celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and by establishing a rhetorical link between the event and Thatcher's 1978 comments, the text reveals Samad's uncanny Thatcherite perspective: "Foolishness. Massive immigration problem to follow…. You just can't let a million people into a rich country. Recipe for disaster" (241). While Samad does not duplicate Thatcher's affable tone, he does replicate her exclusionary views on immigration, while echoing her infamous distrust of a unified and centralized Europe.[19] Samad becomes here less the "raving" "pessimistic" "misfit" within the "blinding sunshine of *White Teeth's* optimism," as Challakere contends, and more an ironic enunciation of Margaret Thatcher's worldview.

As one of the few characters that recognizes the irony of Samad's vicarious Thatcherism, Alsana, his relentlessly witty wife, mocks his response to the collapse of the wall. "Laugh[ing]" "scornfully" at Samad, Alsana retorts by asking: "And who does he think he is…. Original whitecliffsdover piesnmash jellyeels royalvariety britishbulldog, heh?" (241). Alsana links Samad here with stereotypical icons of "white" Britishness, one that can be easily associated with Thatcher's 1978 touting of a distinctive "British character." In accusing Samad of vying for such icons, Alsana calls out his problematic affinity with a discriminatory "white" British discourse. Samad not only vicariously enunciates Thatcher's views on immigration, he also feels "contempt," even "jealousy," for the "happy people dancing on the wall," a troubling response for a character obsessed with the neglected heroic narrative of his rebellious great-grandfather (239). That Samad simply cannot sympathize with the resistant and riotous energies on the television screen

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[19] For Thatcher's views on the unification of Europe see her 1988 "Speech to the College of Europe" in Bruges, where she begins to articulate her skepticism regarding the suppression of nationhood in favor of a more consolidated European community.

demonstrates less his "misfit" qualities and more the complicated nature of his alliances. Archie aptly expounds the complexities of Samad's confused allegiances, during the war: "[h]e [Samad] wished to defend a country that wasn't his and revenge the killing of men who would not have acknowledged him in a civilian street" (95). There is no clear distinction here between Samad and the British colonial system which instigated Mangal Pande's mutiny and subsequent hanging. Samad's "subalternity" is not separate but intertwined within the "hegemonic" colonial and imperial forces his great-grandfather fought against. Smith's representation of Samad, allows him no unadulterated and pure oppositional "subaltern" position to occupy.

For Jay, "[t]he narrative of Samad at war becomes a narrative of Samad at war with *himself*" and the "divisions" he experiences on the front "deepen" (161; original emphasis) through "his agonized responses to the forces of assimilation in London" (159). But reading Samad as an exclusively conflicted migrant figure neglects the playfully ironic energies in which *White Teeth* constructs Samad as a reactionary character. Jay gestures towards this by pointing out Samad's "sinister" obsession with roots, tradition and purity (162). However, while Jay sees this as a misguided mode of resistance, I suggest that this "sinister" quality, when read back into its historical moment, confirms Samad as a conservative figure who, more than any other character in the novel, channels much of the politics of Thatcher's new right discourse. Even in Samad's attempt to retain his Bangladeshi roots by forcing his eldest twin son Magid back to Bangladesh, he re-enacts a voluntary repatriation on behalf of his son, which eerily performs the system of repatriation advocated by Enoch Powell, enshrined in law by the 1971 Immigration Act and drawn upon by Thatcher in the 1981 British Nationality Act.

Reading moments in which Samad channels Thatcher, or more precisely her views, exposes the tacit presence of the Iron Lady's politics within the confines of his chapter. The articulation of a specifically Thatcherite perspective functions as a hidden intertext in *White Teeth* which enables us to pick apart the significance of seemingly minor historical references. The ostensibly inconsequential mention of the Falklands War, for instance, stands out as an aside that has remained almost completely ignored by Smith's critics. In one of the first flirtatious exchanges between Samad and Poppy Burt-Jones, a Glenard Oak teacher, Samad avoids admitting his occupation by casually remarking upon his last days in the War. As he does this, Poppy's face "contort[s] into one large, red, perplexed question mark. 'War?' she said, as if he had said wireless or pianola or water-closet. 'The Falklands?'" (Smith, *White Teeth* 136). In a sense, Poppy's exaggerated confusion at the mention of war, which for her seems as random a topic as the narrator's word associations, may seem logical since it has been thirty-seven years since the end of the Second World War; the Falklands conflict, on the other hand, is only two years expired in the world of the novel. While it is possible to read this scene as Poppy teasingly feigning shock that Samad could have ever been in the War – "Oh, Mr Iqbal, you'd never guess. You must have been ever so young" – it is also necessary to further examine the more troubling aspects of why Poppy contorted with such disbelief at the idea that Samad could have fought in the Falklands (136). The rhetorical campaign to recapture the Falklands Islands, located 8,000 miles away from Britain's shores, was deeply embedded in a racial discourse that, through Thatcher's speeches, likened the Falklanders as "British in allegiance … stock and tradition" ("HC S: Falkland Islands"). That Thatcher articulated Britishness as a matter of royal duty, tradition and a genetic line of decent reveals what Paul Gilroy

has deemed a "rich irony … in the contrast between the intimacy of the 'natural' if long-distance relationship with the Falklanders and the more difficult task of relating to alien intruders who persisted in disrupting life in Britain" (*'There Ain't No Black'* 54). Poppy's contortion exposes her confusion at meeting a "dark skin[ned]" migrant who has fought in what Thatcher rhetorically constructed to be a "white" postimperial British war (Smith, *White Teeth* 136). Poppy's response is not merely an aside but, when read back into the novel's historical context, a poignant moment that excludes Samad from the "white" Britishness that conjoins, in Thatcher's words, the "island race" of the Falklands Islands with the United Kingdom ("HC S: Falklands Islands"). In Poppy's "perplexed" misrecognition of Samad's WWII reference, she effectively marks him as outside the Britain of "whitecliffsdover piesnmash jellyeels royalvariety britishbulldog."

As a response to this exclusion, Smith does not construct Samad as a Rushdian *chamcha*, "a person who sucks up to powerful people, a yes-man, a sycophant" (Rushdie, "The Empire Writes Back" 8), or a ruthless entrepreneurial Thatcherite in the tradition of Hanif Kureishi's Omar and Nasser Ali from *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). Instead, Samad's vicarious Thatcherism reveals itself precisely in its ironic enunciation; the way, for instance, his "subaltern," anti-colonial and anti-western viewpoints become rearticulated and muddled through Thatcher's rhetorically polite Powellism. Because of this, *White Teeth* parodies the boundaries between any neat conception of the "subaltern" and "hegemonic" within the notion of a critical cosmopolitanism. Even with the dizzying representation of its multicultural cast, Smith's text demonstrates a deep scepticism for any kind of pure, abstract or unmitigated cosmopolitanism from below, where the "subaltern" or migrant figure carries the burden of articulating an oppositional progressive

cosmopolitanism. In this way, the novel reifies Pheng Cheah's critique of Mignolo's stratified characterization of contemporary globalization. Cheah suggests that the exploitative approach of cosmopolitanism from above creates marginal spaces not because it excludes minorities but rather because it includes them "into the circuit of the international division of labor" ("The Limits of Thinking" 11). Cheah argues for an understanding of "hegemonic" power through the techniques of biopolitics/body-politics, or, in other words, power conceptualized as productive rather than repressive. For our purposes, that Cheah turns to the productive as well as repressive elements of power is useful in that it highlights the multiple, tangled and striated forms power can take. Thinking through the multifariousness of power structures sheds light on the complex interrelationship that Smith's novel creates between the "subaltern" figures in the text and their complicated affiliations with repressive "hegemonic" discourses.

By exposing the limits of critical cosmopolitanism, *White Teeth* reveals its resistance to attempts at mapping theorized notions of cosmopolitanism onto the novel as it continually ironizes and undermines the ability to comprehensively make sense of itself. Smith's text offers its own limited and conflicting versions of cosmopolitanism through the characters and their engagement with the world around them. In the case of Samad, his purported cosmopolitanism can be read as yet another vicarious iteration of Thatcher's view of society and the world. In a 1987 interview with *Woman's Own* magazine, Thatcher discusses raising and disciplining children in a market-driven economy. "You have got to have rules by which to live," Thatcher tells her interviewer Douglas Keay: "[i]f you live totally isolated and alone like Diogenes in the tub, maybe it does not mind (sic) but the moment you live in a community, you have got to have some rules by which to live" ("Interview for

Woman's Own"). Thatcher's misreading of the Ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope elides the significance of his exile and isolation in relation to the society he openly mocked, for Diogenes "lived in a tub" as a means to critique society; his cosmopolitanism was enacted in the very rejection of his community's "rules by which to live." Thatcher is not interested in an uncomfortably defiant cosmopolitanism, but rather an acquiescent community that adheres to the rules and laws of the country. This is a disconnected community, since, as Thatcher famously put it, "[t]here is no such thing as society": "[t]here are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first" ("Interview for *Woman's Own*"). For Thatcher, a community represents an aggregate of individuals who are connected through their conformity with the "rules by which to live."

Samad shares this notion of privileging the individual and individual actions within the broader concept of a community. Yet, from the perspective of a minority figure in the novel, his defence of a Thatcherite community has been curiously read as an example of *White Teeth*'s progressive cosmopolitanism. Samad's response to Mad Mary, an angry black street woman who occupies a similar isolation from society as Diogenes, is an instructive moment from which to decipher his particular articulation of community and cosmopolitanism. Replying to Mary's ritual questioning of "WHAT'S DE SOLUTION?" Samad begins his speech:

> I am having difficulties myself – we are all having difficulties in this country, this country which is new to us and old to us all at the same time. We are a divided people, aren't we…. We are a split people. And in the end we could argue this out in the street, but I think, in the end, your past is not my past and your truth is not my truth and your solution – it is not my solution. So I do not know what it is you would like me to say. (Smith, *White Teeth* 179)

Sizemore has read this moment as a gesture on part of Samad to bring together a "divided people" "who represent a new English identity that has evolved out of a shared local cosmopolitanism that embraces differences and begins … a positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins" (76). Sizemore reads Gilroy's notion of a demotic cosmopolitanism into the text as a means to uncover a rooted cosmopolitanism that productively refigures "English identity" within the geographic particularity of Willesden. But to read Samad's speech as progressively cosmopolitan here requires the overvaluing of his strategic use of "we" and "us." In his speech, Samad makes a connection between the minority "subaltern" position of Mad Mary and himself by intertwining the difficulties of living in Britain through the histories of colonialism and imperialism that have made "this country" "new to us and old to us all at the same time." By bridging histories of differing colonial subjectivities, Samad creates a potential space for meaningful connection between himself and the Diogenes figure of the novel.

Yet, in this very moment, Samad breaks off these connections by reaffirming his individuality and difference against Mad Mary. While Samad reaches out to her by acknowledging their shared histories, he concomitantly ruptures this connection by exclaiming that "your past is not my past, your truth is not my truth and your solution – it is not my solution." This not only relegates Mad Mary back to the obscurity of isolation, but also shuts down the conversation, as Samad does "not know what … to say" and Mad Mary is left "dumbstruck" (Smith, *White Teeth* 179). This impasse does not demonstrate a cosmopolitanism that connects histories and redefines identities. Rather, it articulates a Thatcherite sense of community based on an individual's conformity to the "rules" of society, for Samad only responds to Mad

Mary because she physically interrupts his walk with Poppy. Mad Mary fails to conform to the "Happy Multicultural" rules of the novel (465), that, as Samad explains, makes mundane "the smelly bustle of black, white, brown and yellow shuffling up and down the high street" (179). Her exclusion from the "bustle" of the passive diversity and accommodation in the novel marks a probing moment that undermines Samad's attempt at meaningfully connecting with her.

White Teeth's insistence on rejecting any cohesive or fixed understanding of cosmopolitanism is played out not only in Samad's failure to develop what we might term a Mignoloian critical cosmopolitanism but also in Irie's *seeming* embodiment of the concept. If Samad, as "the archetypal migrant living in exile," becomes entangled between a "subaltern" and "hegemonic" position in ways that deny him the ability to offer a salutary cosmopolitanism from below, then Irie, mixed-race and of the second generation, proffers a means to disentangle this identity through a rootless cosmopolitanism that entirely transcends painful and conflicting histories (Walters 319). It is in the figure of Irie's unborn child that Smith offers this embryonic rootless cosmopolitanism. Because Irie has sex with both Millat and Magid (Samad's twin sons), there is no way to determine the father of her Jamaican, Bangladeshi, English daughter. "Irie's child," the narrator tells us:

> can never be mapped exactly nor be spoken of with any certainty…. In a vision, Irie has seen a time, a time not far from now, when roots won't matter any more because they can't because they mustn't because they're too long and they're too tortuous and they're just buried too damn deep. She looks forward to it. (Smith, *White Teeth* 527)

For Tracy Walters, Irie's unborn child "symbolises the promise of a multicultural raceless British society" (321). Indeed, as the narrator explains, due to the child's

genetic indeterminacy, she potentially represents the un-encumbrance of "tortuous" histories in favour of a rootless and possibly liberatory cosmopolitan subjectivity. This moment has angered James Wood because, as he argues, Irie becomes "sacrificed" here for the overarching "themes and ideas" explored in the novel (45). Her body becomes a symbolic capsule which carries the unborn deferred utopian future of a "raceless British society." However, if we read the narrator's characterization of Irie's vision, we can see how the novel's own discourse turns upon itself by ironizing any firm conception of identity, race, roots and cosmopolitanism. Irie deeply holds on to the possibility of an un-tortured rootless identity evidenced by her desperate insistence on her child's lack of roots: roots will no longer matter "because they can't because they mustn't because they're too long … too tortuous … buried too damn deep." Her determined need to elide the child's genetic background, its "tortuous" "deep" roots, exposes her anxiety (and awareness) concerning the importance of those very roots. Again, *White Teeth* exposes the limits of any kind of salutary sense of cosmopolitanism. Smith's text stubbornly refuses to depict cosmopolitanism as a ready means to realign and (re)establish new progressive alliances between differing ethnicities, histories and ideological positions.

Conclusion

The post-racial cosmopolitan future that *White Teeth* deliberately attempts to birth becomes effectively undermined when we grant a closer historical consideration of its narrative. Smith's novel articulates its critique of critical cosmopolitanism

through its vicarious engagement with the 1980s: the veiled, intertextual and postmodern aesthetics of the text – which have inextricably contributed to its success – mediate its persistent inability to offer a cohesive or progressive sense of the concept. In contradistinction, the formal aspects of Johnson's work contribute to and forge its articulation of an actually existing cosmopolitanism. Through the paratextual designs of Johnson's Penguin Classics text, the collection is able to foster new (more globalized) readings of the iconic eighties verses in ways that moves them beyond their conventionally local or oppositional framing. Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane* also attempts to challenge its purported localized and parochial sensibilities. By espousing an identifiable aesthetics of transparency, Wheatle depicts the 1981 Brixton riots by provocatively privileging outer-national alliances over local ones. The transparent cosmopolitanism of Wheatle's novel, which is energized by a flexible reimagining of its historical moment, works to fundamentally reshape the revolutionary frontlines of the narrative. As with Smith and Johnson, Wheatle's work makes explicit the complex cross-cultural allegiances that compose the historical sign of 1981/1982.

We are left then with three distinct modalities of re-engaging with this past – the vicarious, the paratextual and the transparent. By framing this chapter around the sign of 1981/1982 I have been able to put into conversation three writers (and three styles of writing) not conventionally examined in relation to one another. The investigation of how these writers discrepantly engage with the 1980s, suggests comparisons that expose the counter-intuitive cosmopolitics embedded within the texts. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this comparison lies in the way in which Smith's novel remains unable to articulate any productive conception of cosmopolitanism. While Smith's much-lauded text offers an important and

generative critique of Mignolo's critical cosmopolitanism, it cannot, in the end, conceive of an alternative. This is perhaps the purpose of *White Teeth*: to assiduously question and resist a clear understanding of itself. However, to my mind, such tactical circumventions capture a specific politics of representation (a new "new ethnicities") that avoids the more radical task of attempting to imagine what a progressive cosmopolitanism might look like. Johnson and Wheatle, for their part, remind us that discussions of cosmopolitanism (within literary studies in particular) need not evade the realm of the "popular." At least in this chapter, it is through the more demotic and popular genres that a productively critical (and meditative) cosmopolitanism finds it base.

3   1989, Global Imaginaries
Black Britain and the Cold War

In his polemic 1989 essay "Against Black British Literature," Fred D'Aguiar boldly announces that "[t]here is no Black British literature, there is only literature with its usual variants of class, sex, race, time and place" (106). He goes on to formulate one of (if not) the most trenchant critiques of the term within the field. The category of black British, D'Aguiar argues, circumscribes and thus interprets the black writer's imagination solely through his or her race: "[a] poem, play, novel or short story by a black author in Britain is no more black than a similar product … by a white author is white" (106). Because the terminology of black British is shaped, according to D'Aguiar, by the negative experiences of racism (here we can discern the beginnings of R. Victoria Arana's argument for the term "African British"), it becomes necessarily an arbitrary moniker that limits the creative capacity of the writer. The term black British is simply too "neat" to critically register the multiplicity of experiences that forge the imaginative work of black authors. For D'Aguiar, "[Black British] literature defies the label black because the writer's imagination is more than race-bound": "[w]hat the writer believes and writes means much more than the race to which s/he belongs" (113). Instead of inhibiting the creativity of black writers through the colour of their skin, D'Aguiar maintains that critics need to find other, "more rigorous indices" from which to examine their work (114).

Since its publication, D'Aguiar's essay has become essential reading for anyone concerned with the nomenclatural (in)adequacy of the term black British.[1] Particularly as it is presented in Maggie Butcher's collection *Tibisiri*, the essay incisively captures one of the key disagreements in black British literary studies staged between D'Aguiar and the black British writer and critic David Dabydeen.[2] Featured within the same collection, Dabydeen's piece "On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today" contests D'Aguiar's claims by arguing that such a "foolis[h]" call for black writers to "drop the eipithet (sic) 'black'" marks a troubling desire for a more universal creative position that does not exist (134). For Dabydeen, retaining "black" (and by implication "black British") is an essential means by which to register the important power politics (racial or otherwise) that have constituted the term. As he puts it, "I feel that I am different, not wholly, but sufficient for me to want to contemplate that which is other in me" (134). Reflective of Stuart Hall's 1988 contention that a "politics of representation" is beginning to usurp the "struggle over the relations of representation," such debates animate the inevitably endless disputes surrounding the moniker of black British ("New Ethnicities" 27). Within these contestations, "Against Black British Literature" has become an exemplar polemic that oscillates between questions of "what … skin colour ha[s] to do with the act of literary creation" and how such expressions necessarily relate to or challenge notions of Britishness (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 10).

While these controversies concerning the efficacy of the term black British have fundamentally shaped the category and study of black British writing, I want to

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[1] We can see this in the introduction to Mark Stein's book *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004), where he composes an overview of the term black British centrally shaped by D'Aguiar's controversial essay (see pp. 9-12).

[2] As Butcher points out in the foreword to the collection, *Tibisiri* gathered work presented in or especially commission in response to the Caribbean Writers' Conference at the Commonwealth Institute, London in 1986.

propose a shift in thinking (one that is of central importance to the argument of this chapter) that enables us to revisit these debates outside the exclusive purview of black British studies; that is to say, I am interesting in rereading D'Aguiar's contentious essay in relation to other, possibly more pertinent, analogous debates occurring at the same time. When we place D'Aguiar's polemic back into its historical context (1989) we can begin to distinguish a more subtle argument composed from an implicitly worldly dispensation. Published the same year as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Rushdie Affair, D'Aguiar's essay offers what could provocatively be read as a commentary influenced by the political fractures and ideologies (East versus West, Communism versus Capitalism) that have constituted the global dynamics of the Cold War. Reading beyond the inflammatory rhetoric that appears to negate the existence of black British literature, D'Aguiar's assertions convey a palpable suspicion towards arbitrary modalities of racial solidarity. His essay, in many ways, is less concerned with the category of black British, than the myriad of political positions such a term necessarily conceals. As D'Aguiar tell us, tracing a black writers ideology "is perhaps" a better way in which to classify his or her work ("Against Black British" 113). By focusing on what (and how) writers are actually writing, D'Aguiar suggests, "[a]n alignment of texts and ideas that are truly radical, innovative and experimental can then come about" (114).

The central thrust of D'Aguiar's essay is not, then, to devalue the developing critical tradition of black British writing (even though this may seem to be the case), but rather to "rescue" its radicalism (114). This importantly means that "not all blacks automatically qualify as radical simply because they are black" (114). The argument here is that ideology is more important than race – as critics, we need to question the arbitrary alliances which have enabled the assumption that black British

cultural production necessarily yields progressive work because it responds to certain historical and social injustices. D'Aguiar calls for an interpretive practice within the study of black British writing that remains not only appreciative but (more importantly) also critical, even suspicious. He develops what we might term a muted "Cold War consciousness" that seeks to establish clear ideological boundaries which can distinguish between the different political and aesthetic positions occupied by black writers and their work.[3]

D'Aguiar makes this claim at a time when the "political badge" of black was beginning to irrevocably fracture in the UK (Malik xi). The burning of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) alongside the subsequent *fatwa* issued by Iran's then Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, split the so-called Afro-Asian unities harboured within the term black British into the more politically (and religiously) salient markers of British Muslim and British Asian. Black could no longer encompass the multiplicity of identities and positions that such events inevitably galvanized. The concept of radicalism, as Kenan Malik reminds us, began to transform as well away from the "militantly secular, self-consciously Western and avowedly left-wing" into what appeared to be new forms of religious fundamentalisms (xii). D'Aguiar's argument crucially intervenes within this conjuncture by suggesting the need to re-examine the overlooked ideologies and radical postionalities contained within the writing of black British authors. Read within its historical moment, D'Aguiar's essay, like the texts in this chapter, unexpectedly explores what these events – "the burning book in Bradford, the crumbling wall in Berlin" – might imply for the study of black British literatures (Malik x). When we recalibrate the frames of reference used to understand "Against

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[3] I borrow the term "Cold War consciousness" from Hugh Wilford's *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (2003).

Black British Literature," we can thus recognize the larger (more worldly) nuances latent in its assertions.

From this wider perspective, D'Aguiar's essay no longer needs to be inevitably paired with Dabydeen's "On Not Being Milton," since the terms of these debates necessarily shift. "Against Black British Literature" can instead be examined more pertinently, for instance, alongside Timothy Brennan's "Cosmopolitans and Celebrities," which was also published in the same year.[4] Throughout his essay, Brennan's arguments resonant with, and implicitly expand upon, many of D'Aguiar's points. As I have previously outlined in my introduction, Brennan calls out the dubious politics of what he terms the category of "Third World cosmopolitan celebrities," which include writers like Mario Vargas Llosa, Bharati Mukherjee, Derek Walcott, Isabel Allende, and Salman Rushdie (2). Like D'Aguiar who remains sceptical of the hidden political impulses behind the grouping of black British literatures, Brennan questions the "political attitude" of these cosmopolitan celebrities who have "enter[ed] the public sphere [through the work of the publishing industries] as a distinct community without a name" (7). For Brennan, such "Third World" writers problematically inhabit elitist cosmopolitan positions precisely through the ways in which they become conflated into a single creative community. Because they are collated with other, more subversive "Third World" writers, these "celebrities" "violat[e] an important Third World rhetorical mode" that aligns itself with radical anti-colonial movements (10). In essence, both D'Aguiar and Brennan chastise here a specific "creative community" (black British or "without a name") that has functioned to obscure its own politics. It is the realm of the cosmopolitan

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[4] Brennan's 1989 essay is an abridged version of a chapter from his book *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, also published in 1989.

that captures, for Brennan, a discourse that strategically mediates the "blurring of political allegiances" within the work of these writers (5).

While Brennan's 1989 essay registers a key moment in cosmopolitan studies that is grounded in the end of the Cold War and the domination of a coming neoliberal world order (details of which I shall return to later in this chapter), it also importantly marks an intellectual affinity with D'Aguiar's own 1989 essay. Because D'Aguiar challenges the assumed allegiances constituted under the sign of black British (similar to how Brennan problematizes certain "Third World" writers), his essay can be read as a matrix of concerns that tacitly brings together the debates surrounding black British writing and cosmopolitanism within the historical conjuncture of 1989; in effect, D'Aguiar's essay begs the question of what happens to black British literature when its politics become suspect, and, as a consequence, how then do such alliances, shaped through the moniker of black British, reconstitute themselves in ostensibly more radical or progressive ways.

The two texts examined in this chapter – Mike Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself* (2000) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (2005) – animate provocative debates concerned with precisely these questions. Both Phillips' and Evaristo's novels revisit the year 1989, specifically through the geographies of the Cold War, as a usable past that forges overlooked cross-cultural and cross-historical alliances. Both writers construct 1989 as a distinctive black British sign of history that has, so far, been largely unexplored. By creatively reimagining the circumstances of the late 1980s, Phillips and Evaristo demonstrate an engagement with the past that actively critiques, amends and (with Phillips) even mimics contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism embedded within a discernable post-Cold War politics. Although both writers depict 1989 in radically different ways – Phillips' crime thriller turns to

Central and Eastern Europe while Evaristo's novel-with-verse traverses through the Middle East – they each remain preoccupied with how this specific juncture might mark new ways to reconceive black Britain on a more global scale.

Because Phillips' and Evaristo's narratives engage with overtly outer-national geographies and affinities, this chapter traces how each of their novels articulate particular global imaginaries reflective of the ways in which they aestheticize cosmopolitanism. I consciously use the term global here as a means to register, as Hall put it in the introduction to chapter two, its dominating, "hegemonic sweep" ("Old and New Identities" 67). As we shall see, both texts specifically investigate the neoliberal politics which frame the globalized terrains their characters exuberantly explore. Such politics become translated into representational tactics – for Phillips, through rhetorical stylizations and metaphors of flattening, and for Evaristo, through the narrative's Russian car – that expose each novels own (at times questionable) political sensibilities. This overarching interest in the year 1989, which primarily brings these two texts together, foregrounds a discussion that provokes "more rigorous indices" from which to examine these contemporary black British novels. The Cold War context that this chapter is centrally preoccupied with re-deploys D'Aguiar's 1989 challenge for a more critical interpretive practice to take hold in the study of black British literatures. It also importantly registers the ways discourses of cosmopolitanism (as articulated by the examined texts) remain necessarily implicated within the difficult political and ideological debates around this specific conjuncture.

The Fall of the Wall and the Stylization of Cosmopolitanism in Mike Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself*

> The fall of the Berlin Wall didn't just help flatten the alternatives to free-market capitalism and unlock enormous pent-up energies of hundreds of millions of people…. It also allowed us to think about the world differently – to see it as more of a seamless whole.
>
>   – Thomas Freidman (*The World is Flat* 51)

> Cosmopolitanism is, among other things, a miasmic mood …
>
>   – Timothy Brennan (*Wars of Position* 212)

Within the intersecting fields of black British literature and crime fiction, the Guyanese-born London writer Mike Phillips has become somewhat of a designated and self-styled maverick. His early crime novels – *Blood Rights* (1989), *The Last Candidate* (1990), *Point of Darkness* (1994), and *An Image to Die For* (1995) – were the first to develop a fictional black British detective through the figure of the journalist-cum-sleuth Sam Dean who, through his private cases, exposes the structural racism and dangerous power imbalances embedded within metropolitan life. The Sam Dean series was followed by the thrillers *The Dancing Face* (1997) and *A Shadow of Myself* (2000), both of which explore crime writing away from the more hard-boiled narratives of Phillips' previous work.[5] While other black British writers have increasingly begun to engage with crime fiction, for instance in Victor Headley's Yardie trilogy (1992; 1993; 1994), Diran Adebayo's *My Once Upon a Time* (2000), Courttia Newland's *Snakeskin* (2002), and Dreda Say Mitchell's

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[5] The American crime writer Dashiell Hammett has often been cited as the archetypal writer of "tough-guy" or "hard-boiled" narratives, which "brin[g] the independence and isolated rectitude of the old frontier hero into conflict with [the] urban crime of modern America" (Knight 135). Hammett's iconic "tough-guy" protagonist Sam Spade, from *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), bears some degree of similarity in name and character with Phillips' Sam Dean. For an incisive overview of the hard-boiled genre and its historical contexts, see Andrew Pepper's "The 'Hard-boiled' Genre" (2010), and Stephen Knight's "'…a hard-boiled gentleman' – Raymond Chandler's Hero" (1980).

Running Hot (2004), critics have revisited the pioneering work of Phillips by ascribing his oeuvre within a necessarily progressive framework and concomitant aura of newness. An unacknowledged critical consensus has begun to develop around Phillips' writing that reflects the ways in which he has "revitalised" (López 60) and "reinvent[ed]" (Plummer 258) the crime fiction format by both "thwarting expectations" (Rupp 285) and creating, in the process, a "neglected" and "new Black British literature" (King 139).[6] Phillips remains keen to pronounce the newness of his own work, particularly within the scope of British crime writing. As he told Patricia Plummer in a 2006 interview: "I'm the only one like me. I was the first to write in the way that I do about the details of the London landscape … from the point of view of a migrant. I was the first, and still the only one I think to challenge received ideas about crime being a sort of morality play" (275).

Phillips' most recent thriller *A Shadow of Myself*, the first of an expected trilogy, turns to Central and Eastern Europe as a means to explore entangled histories of decolonization and black migration within the East/West divisions of the Cold War. The novel reconfigures the consequences of a Europe split by the Iron Curtain as it follows the separated lives of two half-brothers: George, raised by his Russian mother Katya in East Berlin, and Joseph, born in London and raised by his English mother Caroline. The brothers, who share the same Ghanaian father Kofi Coker and bear an uncanny resemblance to each other, grow up not knowing of the other's existence. When they finally meet in post-Cold War Prague, the novel's thriller narrative – where Georgian gangs hunt stolen national artefacts sold by George and

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[6] As one of the few critics who remains critical of Phillips' crime novels (pre-*A Shadow of Myself*), Kwame Dawes reads them as more formulaic than unique or transformative. Dawes contends that by using the crime genre as a template, Phillips' novels sanction a comfortable and settling space for readers to engage with a knowable and popular form: "his readership remains intrigued by the work without that overweening sense that they are entering into another world" ("Negotiating the Ship" 23).

his Russian cousin Valentin – begins to enmesh the brothers into each other's lives. In contrast to Phillips' earlier novels, *A Shadow of Myself* brings together a multi-layered transnational narrative that omnisciently shifts between the perspectives of its many characters. The novel is not just a post-Cold War thriller, but also a memoir, written by Kofi during his time in 1950s Moscow, a family reunion, that brings together the brothers and their families, and a love story, between Kofi and Katya who were separated by the opportunist betrayal of a close friend. Aspects of the novel echo Phillips's own family history in Eastern Europe, which inspired him to think "about the way that Central Europe and the areas behind the Iron Curtain had related to the Third World"; the ensuing narrative that Phillips constructs, shaped in many ways through a personal attachment to the region, traces the contours of a black European history implicated within the global schisms between communism and capitalism, East and West, North and South (Sternberg 389-399).[7]

The expansive scope of the text, which interweaves between Moscow, London, Hamburg, Prague and Berlin, coupled with its thrillerish elements – Stasi secret agents, Georgian criminal gangs, and a corrupt oil tycoon – prompted many reviewers to argue that Phillips' latest novel "subvert[s]" (Jakubowski) the thriller genre since its narrative themes remain "hardly conventional" (Rathbone 9). Given what crime writer Maxim Jakubowski described as the "paucity of black writers in British crime fiction," Phillips was seen to offer a "clever" (Morton) and "cosmopolitan" ("Best of This Year's" 13) thriller that moved beyond "deal[ing] with only black issues" (Morton). Yet, while the suspenseful backdrop of the Cold War is by no means unique to the thriller genre – a truism the popular spy novels of

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[7] In an interview with Claudia Sternberg, Phillips discusses his fascination with his late-older brother's experiences in the East. His brother had spent time in Poland and East Germany, had attended the University of Moscow and was a fervent Marxist (389).

British crime writer John le Carré adhere to – Phillips' engagement with this particular moment was curiously read as atypical. The newness of *A Shadow of Myself* was articulated, by critics and reviewers alike, less through its narrative innovations and more through the author's position as a black (crime) writer. Because no other black British crime writer has yet to examine the Cold War and/or Eastern Europe, Phillips' novel, which is set predominantly outside the boundaries of Britain, was presumed to be illustrating a positive move beyond explorations of not only exclusively "black issues" but also race in Britain.

Critics interpret Phillips' purported move away from black Britain as one that "open[ed] up the discursive spaces of both Europe and blackness" (Pirker, "The Unfinished Revolution" 138). The novel's creation of "diasporic European characters" (Nyman 90) – from Africa, the Caribbean, Russia, Turkey, Iraq, Uzbekistan – created, as Jan Rupp contends, "affinities between Black Europeans and other marginal or peripheral people" (285) while intermingling them within post-national and "transnational networks" (Nyman 90). Since Phillips' previous novels focused on issues of migration, race and belonging in metropolitan London (with the exception of the New York setting in *Point of Darkness*), the imaginative shift towards Europe in *A Shadow of Myself* was read as an ambitious "globaliz[ation]" of his past thematic concerns (Nyman 91). However, in asserting that the novel operates within a more globalized and hybrid space, both reviewers and critics have tended to evacuate the post-Cold War politics of the text, mystifying the novelty of Phillips' turn to Central and Eastern Europe as altogether progressive. By interrogating the ways in which *A Shadow of Myself* reimagines the East/West divisions of the Cold War, I argue that we can uncover the more fraught ways the text attempts to *style* itself a global imaginary. I want to develop the suggestion that

in its preoccupation with cosmopolitan spaces, such as Hamburg and Berlin,
alongside its representation of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the novel constructs a
stylized and rhetorical cosmopolitanism through its use of symbolically potent
scenes of diasporic migration, global community, trans-European travel and
sameness. It is because of this donning of a cosmopolitan discourse that critics have
generally responded so favourably to the novel.

To begin an exploration of how Phillips' text entices critical responses that
fixate upon its progressive worldly characteristics, it is useful to first examine a
specific instance of such a response. In an extensive interview with Phillips in 2007,
Claudia Sternberg asks the following question:

> Unlike your earlier novels, *A Shadow of Myself* is not about life in
> contemporary London but reaches across time and space; it connects
> East and West, Europe and the Third World, the Cold War period and
> developments in the last ten years. What is the background for the
> novel's cosmopolitanism? (388)

Like many other critics, Sternberg locates *A Shadow of Myself* as capturing an
important geographic and thematic shift within Phillips' oeuvre. And like reviewers
of the novel, she remarks upon the broad historical breadth of the text as a prompt
that articulates its salutary global outlook: the novel's "cosmopolitanism" becomes a
discernable function of its "reac[h] across time and space." But what assumptions
can we uncover in Sternberg's effortless ascription of cosmopolitanism to Phillips'
text? The imaginative geography Sternberg evokes is not just any geography; she is
drawing attention to the novel's explicit engagement with the Cold War, its
East/West North/South divisions. Her use of cosmopolitanism identifies a certain
engagement with the past that investigates the global divisions enunciated by

imaginaries of the Cold War: East versus West, Europe versus the Third World. According to Sternberg, then, the cosmopolitanism of Phillips' text remains centrally forged through a distinctively Cold War dispensation.

This tacit connection between the apparent cosmopolitanism of *A Shadow of Myself* and its imaginative interest in the geographies of the Cold War reiterates the ways in which contemporary discourses of cosmopolitanism have been rhetorically entangled within the geopolitical (and in this case, geopoetic) constitution of 1989. As Timothy Brennan reminds us, it was not until after the fall of communism that debates concerning cosmopolitanism began to proliferate, transforming the concept into one that has become "irrepressibly positive" (*Wars of Position* 219). For Brennan, much of the current critical debates surrounding cosmopolitanism act as a form of "dress" or "garmen[t]" (221) that crucially "veil[s]" neoliberal and imperial ambitions in congratulatory global terms (227): "[c]osmopolitanism's colloquial connotations are so overwhelmingly positive and liberal," as we have just seen with Sternberg's use of the term, "that one rarely remarks on the multipurpose ambiguity of those values it relays" (207). In locating a troubling consensus within "cosmo-theory" (one that is framed by the end of Cold War and global capitalism's supposed coup), Brennan refigures cosmopolitanism as a "miasmic mood" which operates as a means to obscure meaning (212). Cosmopolitanism, Brennan ultimately suggests, is an obfuscated and over-stylized academic rhetoric of dubiety that disguises imperious ways of thinking.

More than just propounding a scathing appraisal of the field of cosmopolitan studies, Brennan discursively offers an examination of the rhetorical flourishes that have come to characterize recent expressions of cosmopolitanism. What Brennan proposes is a critique of a particular expressive modality, or style, of *fashioning*

cosmopolitanism that engages with a reactionary politics in ways that conceal or mystify such an engagement.[8] The articulation or rather critique here of a dubious politics and poetics of cosmopolitanism, one which I am attempting to glean from Brennan's writing, offers a productive lens from which to read not only the questionable critical responses to Phillips' text, but also the text itself. The language of clothing – "veil," "dress," "garment" – usefully delineates how *A Shadow of Myself* (like Brennan's notion of "cosmo-theory") stylizes a distinctive global imaginary (at the level of both form and content) that obscures a more troubling conservative narrative. In a series of close readings, I investigate the ways in which Phillips' novel fashions a form of literary cosmopolitanism that appears to enunciate new (and progressive) global imaginaries. I do not disagree, then, with Sternberg's suggestion that the novel's subject matter captures a certain cosmopolitical dispensation; however, in what follows, I explore how *A Shadow of Myself* performs this cosmopolitanism as a stylization, one that less veils than exposes its neoliberal and Anglocentric sensibilities.

The novel's opening scene in Hamburg's bustling *Hauptbahnhof* reveals a syntactic and rhythmic attention to movement and travel in ways that demonstrate the text's explicit stylization of cosmopolitan motifs. As the second largest city in Germany, with the second largest port in Europe, Hamburg represents a hub of travel and tourism in northern Germany. By opening with Hamburg, particularly its railway station – a space of constant movement and exchange – the novel begins by

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[8] Brennan's use of the pejorative term "cosmo-theory" remains not only grounded within a critique of a particular politics, but also, and more centrally, one of style. He takes issue, for instance, with the ways in which cosmopolitan criticism ignores the dynamics of "actual power" through an "overdeveloped sensitivity to significant cases of mixed forms of cultural life" (*Wars of Position* 223). What Brennan draws our attention to, however, is how these articulations of cosmopolitanism depend upon "vivid" "anecdot[es] and "discourses of 'processes,' 'movements,' and unfoldings, rather than designs, projects, or campaigns" (223). This attention to language and rhetorical form demonstrates what I regard to be more of an interest in the discursive tactics of "cosmo-theory" than the actual politics (or lack-there-of) within such work.

presenting a narrative preoccupied with cosmopolitan spaces. Through George's perspective, the railway station is vividly rendered as brimming with "office workers" and those that haunt the crevices of the station (Phillips; *A Shadow* 3). It is a place where:

> there was a constant flurry of people coming and going. Around the margins prowled a scattering of hucksters, buskers, hawkers and hustlers; a flock of gypsy women, brown faces and heavy eyebrows shrouded in rainbow shawls, a couple of Turks selling lottery tickets, three lurking Uzbekis, swarthy and battered, red eyes darting furtively, a red-haired German youth in a tight black suit and dark glasses playing riffs on an alto-sax, a middle-aged drunk with a ravaged face above his outstretched hand. (3-4)

Within the booming space of Hamburg's station, George sees less of the "office workers" than the "human flotsam" that renders the port city like "a hundred other … places in the centre of Europe" (4). This graphic oceanic imagery takes us to the corners of the station where we find a peripheral cast of characters, the effective debris of the railway station. The "flock of gypsy women," the "couple of Turks," the "three … Uzbekis," the "red-haired German," and the "middle-aged drunk" enumerate what would seem to be, as Jopi Nyman suggests, "a hybridized space where different histories of colonization, migration, and violence come together"; it is through such "flows" that "European identities are shown to be hybrid, rather than pure" (89). But these are the *shadows* of the station, "prowl[ing]" and "lurking" within the obscured darkness of the "margins." Like the African migrants that line the station and shoreline, the "hucksters, buskers, hawkers, and hustlers" become "rats, scuttling steadily through alien cities, from disaster to oblivion" (Phillips, *A*

Shadow 5). The novel's rhythmic anaphoric-like list of migrants, beggars, and sellers offers a perfunctory hybridity, where there is no "com[ing] together" of histories or cross-cultural exchanges – tourists view the African musicians with "patronising curiosity" (4) and George sees them with "a swell of resentment" (5). The descriptive "ebb and flow" of people throughout the station serves only to distinguish their disconnected existence (4). George remains entirely separate from the "flotsam," as he hurries with his cousin Valentin into a stolen Jaguar.

In detailing the movements of itinerant migrants and those that occupy the margins of the railway station, the text's omniscient narrator stylizes their presence to the point of caricature. Watching the station's resident Africans singing old Motown hits, George recognizes his own distorted view of them. Because of the stories told to him by his mother, George imagines that Africans "would be tall and heroic presences, men whose eyes looked into far and beautiful distances" (5). He understands that these images are "fantasy" (5) particularly when he examines the Africans in front of him with their "loose shirts" and "cheap imitations of African cloth" (3). Yet, despite this, George's perspective of the African men becomes articulated in hyper-stylized and verbose terms. "[H]e has seen too many of" these Africans at the station: "their breaths furred and stinking, their bodies racked with the pain and exhaustion of how far they had come, their skins and hair grey…. [their] red eyes glistening with the lust to survive … movements swift and stealthy as rats" (5). With another anaphoric list shaped by a steady rhythmic rendering of a catalogue of features, George evacuates much of the humanity of the African singers as he depicts them in grotesque, deformed, even animalistic ways. His recognition of their pain demonstrates less of an empathic connection than a separation between himself and the African migrants. If Hamburg is meant to represent a space of

hybridity or "com[ing] together," then it is one that marks painful and coercive displacements. The language of movement in this passage does not reiterate the smooth "flows" of "global migrations," as Nyman contends, but rather the circumscribed scampering of the marginalized (89). With his index of trans-European travellers, hustlers and desperate migrants, George creates a tally those who cannot participate in the "hybrid Europe" purportedly constructed by the novel (Nyman 91). In these opening moments, the novel caricatures, not valorizes, the notion of a "hybrid Europe."

Such ephemeral scenes of travel and so-called mobility depict a narrative of globalization that appears to offer a form of cosmopolitanism from below, one where we might find muted affinities drawn out between the Turks, Uzbekis, the red-haired German and the Africans. The emphasis on the transient movements of these migrants and beggars inspires a salutary reading like Nyman's, who goes on to argue that "the novel shows how its diasporic European characters … all embedded in transnational networks, are liberated from the past of the Empires, British and Soviet" (90). The cross-cultural links captured by the narrative reveals however more of an earnest modality of cosmopolitan stylization than any kind of "liberat[ing]" or meaningful transnational connections. Upon closer inspection, we discover that "encounters between diasporic characters, displaced and inhabiting spaces not entirely theirs," *do not* necessarily "lead to the forming of community" (Nyman 88). Brought together through George's gaze, these "diasporic characters"/caricatures are undeniably separated from each other's lives. While Phillips poignantly registers the hubbub of the railway station, there remains no unifying sense of community: George occupies an entirely different world from the transient cast of characters he watches and the only "flows" that we find comes from

the streets that are "flow[ing] with the rich, hot scent of … shining metal" – the cars that Valentin steals (Phillips, *A Shadow* 30).

Though the opening scene at Hamburg's *Hauptbahnhof* offers a gloomy depiction of movement and travel, its stylized and anaphoric rendering by Phillips identifies one of the ways in which the text attempts to fashion itself a global imaginary distinctly concerned with notions of cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural communities. We can see this exploration of worldly themes more explicitly in the novel's representation of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In engaging with such an iconic historical conjuncture, that remains intimately connected with contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism, *A Shadow of Myself* exposes yet another moment in which it ventures to examine and compose a cosmopolitical narrative. As Padmaja Challakere reminds us, particularly in the fields of business and political economy, the fall of the Berlin Wall has been "loudly mobilized as cultural currency" and "in recent years" it has occupied "a tremendous rhetorical yield." As one of the most identifiable symbols of unity and unification, the fall of the wall has often been claimed as the apotheosis of a hopeful planetary vision – a "symbolic representation of a collective destiny" that harnessed "an unpartisan collaboration between peoples to solve the planet's problems" (Bindé 52; Taylor xvii). Because the splitting of Berlin came to enunciate a global imaginative geography that distinguished the East/West divisions and ideologies of the Cold War, its reunification provoked hyperbolic exaltations of a new world order, or as some went so far as to claim, the end of history (Fukuyama 1989). For Berthold Schoene, the Berlin Wall's destruction pronounced an "indeterminate, open-ended imagining of world community" that was "spontaneous" "desultory" and "chaotic" (21). Robert Fine's contemporary survey study *Cosmopolitanism* (2007) opens tellingly in this mood of

eruptive optimism. As he tells us: "[t]he physical dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 offers a compelling image of the breaking down of boundaries maintained by force and of the re-opening of suppressed forms of human contact" (1). The impromptu communal solidarity expressed in the wall's "physical dismantling" pinpoints the cornerstone of contemporary cosmopolitan discourse for Fine. Its fall gave credence to "the idea that human beings can belong anywhere, humanity has shared predicaments and we find our community with others in exploring how these predicaments can be faced in common" (x).

Deployed for rhetorical means, the fall of the Berlin Wall has increasingly become symbolic of a salutary cosmopolitanism that envisions the promises of a boundless world community. The ideological imperatives of neoliberal capitalism crucially shape these cosmopolitan imaginaries in ways that alert us to the geopolitical investments within the sign of 1989. The American journalist Thomas Friedman most notably marks the moment of the fall of the wall as one that heralded a new, more levelled, world grounded in the principles of free market capitalism. Freidman uses the metaphor of flatness to demonstrate how a new global imaginary is taking shape as a result of the supposed triumph of global capitalism over totalitarian communism. As he explains:

> The fall of the Berlin Wall didn't just help flatten the alternatives to free-market capitalism and unlock enormous pent-up energies of hundreds of millions of people in places like India, Brazil, China, and the former Soviet Empire. It also allowed us to think about the world differently – to see it as more of a seamless whole. Because the Berlin Wall was not only blocking our way; it was blocking our sight – our ability to think about the world as a single market, a single ecosystem, and a single community. (51)

Reiterating Fine's suggestion that the fall of the wall unleashed the stifled and partitioned energies of those within the so-called East, Freidman contends that this eruptive "unlock[ing]" of "hundreds of millions of people" radically refigured a globe that was once split in half between two incommensurable and simplified life worlds – the authoritarian East and the democratic West. Like the staunch libertarian Milton Friedman, Thomas Friedman argues that the domination of free-market capitalism enables human freedom in ways that reveal the world's "collective destiny" (Bindé 52). His assertion that the world is flat, or "more of a seamless whole," imagines a worldly horizon, or a flattened cosmos, where "a single market" and "community" imperiously dominates. Friedman rhetorically stylizes a neoliberal cosmopolitanism that deploys many of the same linguistic codes used in Brennan's articulation of "cosmo-theory," entangling the purportedly "unpartisan" euphoria associated with the fall of the wall with, what Challakere has termed, "the metaphorizing mode of neoliberal capitalism." The poetics and politics of the fall of the wall become intimately entangled here, as the event's depiction comes to signify a particular ideological disposition.

Does the representation of the fall of the Berlin Wall, with its uneasy rhetorical baggage, inevitably reiterate, then, a Friedmanian neoliberal cosmopolitanism? In Challakere's view, literary representations of the fall of the wall have signalled the various ways in which fiction has reinforced, even mimicked, the ideological inflections of neoliberal cosmopolitanism. The fall of the wall in contemporary fiction has all too often marked a reactionary symbolic tactic that

buttresses the "romantic mythology" of an uncritically borderless world.[9] While Challakere deftly articulates the ways in which neoliberal discourses have been aestheticized within contemporary literature, her analysis remains limited in its reluctance to acknowledge the ways literary texts can both resist and reify such hegemonic cultural values. We can see this dynamic in Phillips' representation of the fall of the Berlin Wall where the euphoria associated with the event becomes *self-consciously* stylized. On the one hand, the fall of the wall in the novel signals the ways the text "mimics," to use Challakere's words, a neoliberal articulation of cosmopolitan borderlessness; yet, in these moments, the novel appears to be concomitantly aware of its own mimicking. To some extent, *A Shadow of Myself* parodies its verbose engagement with the fall of the wall in ways that draws attention to the well-worn epochal characteristics of the event.

When Radka, George's Czech wife, tells Joseph about the day the wall fell, she conveys its clichéd cinematic potential: "[y]ou should have been there. It would have made a great movie" (Phillips, *A Shadow* 93). Joseph's mind is then inundated by a "stream of images," "a mob of young people chanting, ecstatic with fear and rage, a row of grim-faced refugees, curling nests of barbed wire" (93). This inventory of dramatic scenes are mere simulations of the event for Joseph who admits "he found it hard to tell whether he had actually seen them on the TV screen or whether he has cobbled them together out of his imagination" (93). Radka, confirming Joseph's imaginative newsreel, remembers the fall of the wall in similarly cinematic ways:

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[9] In her essay, "Aesthetics of Globalization in Contemporary Fiction," Challakere focuses at length on specifically three novels: Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Nicholas Royle's *Counterparts*, and Phillip Hensher's *Pleasured*.

all up and down the line people, their spirits fired by the magnitude of the event, were spouting off impromptu bursts of rhetoric…. Sometimes George looked round at her, laughing, and from time to time they kissed openly, squeezing each other's bodies, more unified than they had ever been. She remembered all this as if it had been a drunken roaring dream, oases of clarity alternating with moments of crazed frenzy. At the Wall they shouted, kicked and tore at the crumbling fabric with their hands, tossing the fragments around them like so much rubbish…. (88)

Written from Radka's perspective, the novel captures the moment of the fall of the wall as uniformly rapturous and celebratory, where a "desultory" and "spontaneous" mood of solidarity conjoins everyone in levelling the formidable barrier. Radka's memories of the event are not unlike Joseph's, who also remembers the moment in distinctly hyperbolic and unreal terms. For Joseph the fall of the wall conjures recycled images whose origins he cannot remember; for Radka the event too remains unclear, alternating between dream, clarity and frenzy. Mimicking Friedman's magniloquent appraisal of the event, the novel appears to relish in this epochal instance of flattening where boundaries and borders become entirely levelled; however, in recapitulating an iconic series of images (where chaotic mobs rush to the tear down the wall), the narrative remains, to some extent, conscious of its own mimicking. The unreality of the moment (for both Joseph and Radka) renders the fall of the wall as more of an intense simulation than a realistic depiction of the event.

The representational strategies used by Phillips composes the fall of the Berlin Wall primarily through this modality of intensity; that is, the anaphoric effect impelled by the prose indexes the ferociously eruptive mood of the moment in ways that take us to the limits of the novel's realist form. Here, in the novel's depiction of the fall of the wall, we find an inventive prose that reimagines the past in explicitly

figurative ways. As Radka tells us, "she remembered" the moment "like a piece of music, starting slowly then building rapidly to a crescendo" (87). The musicality of Radka's memories is forged through Phillips' writing: the rhythmic pace of the narrative intensifies as Radka catalogues the swelling of the mob as they gather near the wall. Recounting those "first notes, distant and piercing," Radka details how the "streams of people" come to shape "the eddying movement of the mob" (87). This jarring mixed-metaphor (between music and the imagery of water) introduces a significant poetic discrepancy in Radka's account of the moment while contributing to the ephemeral mood of the event. The obfuscated rendering of Radka's memories begins to problematize any simplistic reading of this moment. As Radka reminds us, "memory" is "an illusion" – "like a magic trick" it can be interpreted in multiple ways (87).

Such a stylization of Radka's account of the fall of the wall, not only alerts us to the illusory nature of her description but also the way in which it opens a critical perspective on the event. In other words, *A Shadow of Myself* suggests a tenuous critique here of Freidman's neoliberal cosmopolitanism and the supposed epochal change and unity wrought by the fall of the wall. Comparing Berlin during its Cold War and post-wall years, George remembers that:

> [m]ore than six years after the Wall came down the noise of drilling and hammering, the smell of paint, scaffolding and a kind of scattered bustle was inescapable, but somehow the changes only served to emphasise the familiar look of the place. Alongside the splashes of renovation was the scarred brick of the tenement blocks, and it was the same with the people. Under the short skirts and high heels, or the tight jeans and tailored jackets which had sprouted along the

> Schönhauser Allee, were the same scrawny bodies and sallow
> complexions. (18-19)

The post-wall "flattening" of Berlin becomes enunciated as only a superficial transformation. The city that stood at the centre of the Cold War becomes refigured cosmetically – to George, even after its renovation the familiarity of the place remains intact, if not more so, and the "scarred brick of tenement blocks" stays untouched. Tellingly, this description of the city takes us to its commercial and shopping core on the Schönhauser Allee, where the "bustle" of consumerism marks the triumphant noises of successful capitalism. While George's lascivious perspective takes us up the "short skirts" and "tight jeans" of the women that traverse the shopping street, he underlines the ways post-Cold War Berlin has been merely *fashioned* to appear new. The divisions between East and West Berlin are distinct in this passage, undermining the notion that the fall of the wall unified the city into a "seamless whole." Like Hamburg, George sees Berlin as a globalized city that performs its own version of a superficial post-Wall cosmopolitanism.

The way in which the text stylizes these scenes appears to indicate a certain level of scepticism towards metaphorizing modes of neoliberal cosmopolitanism which hyperbolically figure a borderless and flattened imaginative geography of the world. From this, it would seem that the novel aesthetically "wears" its cosmopolitanism, through its engagement with cosmopolitan themes, motifs and moments, as a means to satirize the term and its contemporary usage. But this critical energy is tempered by the novel's own participation in such modalities of representation as it constructs (and valorizes) a "Wild West" Central and Eastern Europe dominated by "the benefits of economic liberalism" (Phillips, *A Shadow* 357; 356). The ease with which characters travel in post-Cold War Europe – Kofi flies

from Berlin to Prague and back in "about an hour" (362) – and the ways the novel conflates geographies across Europe – whereby the Zizkov district in Prague becomes effortlessly twinned with the East End of London (120) – suggests a flattened Continent that can only be navigated by those like Kofi (with the help of a billionaire oil tycoon), who can afford to be "whisked back and forth by car" (362). This borderlessness ascribed to the novel's post-Cold War European geography has lured critics into reading the text as moving beyond "fixed notions of national belonging" (Nyman 91) and articulating "a European identity that overrides ethnicity" (Rupp 286). However, as I argue below, the novel's enunciation of a flattened Europe reveals not only its own entanglement with Friedmanian modes of representation, but also, and more importantly, its inability to construct a place for its purported transnational characters to live. In its attempt to imagine permeable Central and Eastern Europe spaces for its multi-ethnic characters, *A Shadow of Myself* exposes a paradoxical vision of Europe that is at once diverse and borderless yet emptied by the end as everyone, except George, leaves for London. The novel ultimately fails to meaningfully imagine a world for its characters that moves beyond the boundaries of (black) Britain.

The twinning of the brothers articulates a provocative embodied representation of the ways in which the novel manages to flatten aspects of post-Cold War European spaces. Their textual twinning invites an allegorical examination of how the narrative imitates representational modes of neoliberal cosmopolitanism. Maintaining the thematic exploration between the East/West divisions of the Cold War, the novel splits (British) Joseph from (East German) George along the same dichotomous lines. When Joseph first meets George in Prague, he registers only a faint similarity – "he had the peculiar feeling that he was looking at a jumbled up

version of himself" – but he attempts to distance himself from what he thinks is a "scam" (Phillips, *A Shadow* 49; 54). Joseph and George are not actual twins. While they share the same father, the brothers have different mothers and a five-year gap between them. Yet, as the brothers spend more time with each other, their bodies soon begin to conflate with one another's. When Joseph and Kofi first look at a photograph of young George standing with Katya, they realize this uncanny likeness:

> Beside her, holding her hand, was a small boy, who, for one heart-stopping instant, seemed to be Joseph. The resemblance was remarkable, Kofi thought, and it would have been easy to imagine that the two boys had the same mother. In a moment Joseph got up and, holding the photograph in his hand, walked over to Kofi's little collection of photographs on the wall facing him. He stood there staring at another photograph of himself at the same age, which had been taken at school. From where he was sitting Kofi couldn't see it, but he knew that it would be hard to locate the difference. (148)

For Joseph, this unsettling autoscopic moment enunciates not the degree of similarity between him and his half-brother, but their uniform sameness: "[t]heir hair curled in the same way, bristled in a peak over the forehead, and they had the same crooked, almost wry smile, curving their lips" (148). Difference in the photograph is "hard to locate." George too experiences this uncanny sameness. Putting Joseph to bed, George gets a "curious feeling that he was handling his own body, the smooth ochre skin, the curling black hair, the stubborn stubble on the chin" (325). George and Joseph even focus on the same body parts – the hair and the face – to trace the contours of their resemblance.

In her study of contemporary twin narratives, Juliana de Nooy notes that modern twin stories often indicate the "triumph of sameness over difference";

"[r]ather than creating division [like in the foundational myths of Romulus and Remus], they provide a means for surmounting it" (115). The sameness of the twins often provides a solution instead of a problem for the narrative (115). Indeed, the twinning of Joseph and George resolves many of the problems of the narrative – it evidences the coming together of their families alongside a figurative post-Cold War unification between the East and the West. Their conjoining signals a uniformity that soon begins to eradicate the differences between the brothers. "Twins who grow up separated," George tells Joseph, "marry the same kind of women, have the same tastes, wear the same clothes" (Phillips, *A Shadow* 101). George soon realizes the truth of his conjecture, as he later chides Joseph: "You lived my life, you wear my clothes, you sleep in my bed, and now my wife" (373). As the story moves forward, the brothers increasingly meld into each other, offering the thriller narrative opportune and tense moments of mistaken identities. Joseph discovers this in Prague, as his uncanny resemblance to his hunted brother marks him out as a target.

This proxy relationship between the brothers exposes how the novel figures twinning as a crucial metaphor for unity and unification. We can see the materialization of this metaphor within the narrative's concluding substitution act where George leaves his family to forge himself a new life, leaving Joseph as his surrogate. Because George figures Joseph as his proxy, he remains untroubled by his choice. As he explains to Joseph:

> You know I always feared that idea, that she [Radka] would leave me and go to another man, maybe a white man…. Around here, almost certainly a white man. Then my son would be calling him his father, or thinking about him in that way. He would forget me or hate me. I don't know. The idea frightened me all the time. Then I was thinking, you are my brother. Kofi is my father. Katya is my mother. If my son

> was with you, how could you be cruel to your own blood? No problem. Maybe Radka understands that. You know it is strange. All these years I've had dozens of women. Suddenly she goes for my brother. I think she wanted to get rid of me without changing anything but me. (385)

George articulates his relationship to his brother most explicitly here as that of a twin. The decision to leave his son to George appears sensible since Serge will usefully maintain a genetic link to his "new" father. Joseph becomes, in effect, the carbon copy of George enabling Radka "to get rid of [him] … without changing [him]." The ease of this exchange demonstrates the extent to which the plot relies upon the interchangeability of the brothers: George was waiting for a Joseph so he could unmoor himself from his domestic life without fear or guilt.

The sameness between these brothers creates, however, a dangerous conflation that begins to flatten their differences in troublingly metaphorical ways. Like the fall of the wall, the convergence of the two brothers brings together people and ideas from both sides of the "East" and "West." Yet, while these unifications remain important, even the novel reminds us to be wary of their presumed progressive qualities. The logic within the supposed triumph of capitalism that fosters, according to Freidman, a productively "seamless" world, is the same logic that dictates what we might term here the "triumph of the same" between the twins. This fixation on sameness rehearses the imperious dynamics of neoliberal cosmopolitanism, which flattens difference in favour of a dominating uniformity. While *A Shadow of Myself* represents the distinctive and different histories of its transnationally framed Cold War narrative, its persistence in overemphasizing harmony and similarity betrays its more conservative outlook precisely through the triumph of the same. By twinning Joseph and George as a means to conveniently

interchange them at the end, the novel dulls the radical potential of its narrative as it consciously unifies the family through exclusively genetic and racial lines. The coming together of Kofi's family is predicated on a burden to utterly harmonize the brothers: George must be sacrificed as he forfeits himself and his life entirely to Joseph.

The novel's ending poignantly articulates the impossibility inherent within its depiction of sameness. Like two matched magnetic poles, Joseph and George must repel each other; they cannot exist within the same narrative space for an extended period of time. The novel's drive towards unity and unification marks the ways it attempts to work against this impossibility as a means to continually connect its characters, often at the expense of more complex and incongruent stories. The persistent triumph of sameness characterizes how the text proposes a stylized and largely superficial cosmopolitanism. We can find the articulation of such a perfunctory cosmopolitanism most explicitly with Serge, George's and Radka's mix-raced son, who has been hailed as the novel's "visionary figure": the "quintessential citizen of the new Europe" (Rupp 285). Before his now-extended family moves to London, Kofi christens Serge as a "new man": an "African, Russia, Czech, German, soon to be Englishman" (Phillips, *A Shadow* 388). Listing all of Serge's ancestral links, Kofi attempts to figure Serge as the ideal cosmopolitan figure of a so-called "new Europe." However, like its opening scene in Hamburg's railway station, the novel evacuates anything progressive about Serge's mixed-raced background, which becomes subsumed under the banner of "Englishman." By indexing Serge's many ethnicities, the text merely *fashions* him as a progressively cosmopolitan figure. He is meant to represent the future of the family in all of its transnational and intercultural interconnections; but, as an African, Russian, Czech, German, Serge is

noticeably unable to exist in any of these spaces. He moves to London, Radka tells us, so that he can be with other mixed-raced and black "people like himself" (367).

Serge's move to England not only privileges London as the only truly cosmopolitan location in the novel, but it also nullifies much of the cultural and political work of this post-Cold War thriller. As Phillips himself has eloquently remarked, "British fiction ha[s], so far, failed to meet the challenge of a new East European context" in ways that offers a "useful imagery about the region and its people" ("Narratives of Desire" 45; 47). As a black British writer, Phillips attempts to provocatively construct new connections between Britain and the rest of Europe by both expanding the subject material conventionally ascribed to black British fiction while transforming the "moral and political landscape[s]" consigned to the East ("Narratives of Desire" 45). In *A Shadow of Myself*, he envisions a Europe (East and West) constituted by the divisions of the Cold War and the necessarily entangled histories of decolonization and black migration. Throughout his novel, Phillips delineates a distinctive black European narrative, particularly through Kofi's diaries, that attests to the long and complicated presence of black communities in Europe. Yet, Phillips undermines much of this work in the conclusion to his novel by relegating Serge to the UK. If Serge captures the future of a purportedly hybrid Europe, then this future is firmly located in London and away from the Eastern part of Europe Serge grew up. The ending of *A Shadow of Myself* illustrates, to my mind, a failure to imagine and "meet the challenge of a new East European context." Serge's move to London does not expose how the novel deconstructs essentialisms, as Jopi Nyman argues; rather it identifies a troubling geographic circumscription of its racialized characters that renders Eastern Europe as an effectively unliveable place (Nyman 91). Serge reveals how difference becomes contained into a counter-

intuitive sameness within the novel, since he moves away from the East precisely to be "people *like* himself" (my emphasis).

The kind of overwrought, ostensibly post-racial, unity that Serge is made to represent (much like Irie's unborn child in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*) captures the narrative's participation in metaphorizing a modality of neoliberal cosmopolitanism that reifies the mythology of a borderless world. Serge's freedom to move anywhere in the novel's post-1989 terrain enables the bringing together of a new family (without George) now based in the metropolitan space of London. This is a narrative cosmopolitanism forged through capital (without the money from the Ukrainian oil tycoon, Radka and Serge would not have been able to move) and a rhetorical engagement with the geographic imaginaries of the Cold War. While the novel articulates its version of cosmopolitanism in consistently perfunctory ways – that is, through various modalities of stylization, whether rhetorical, imagistic, or syntactic – I am not convinced that it offers us a satire or critical view of the cosmopolitan scenes it creates. *A Shadow of Myself* stylizes cosmopolitanism only to the extent that it exposes its own superficial engagement with the concept. The novel remains, in many ways, caught between the realist genre of crime fiction and a more stylized historical narrative of cross-cultural and intergenerational intrigue. Its cosmopolitanism foregrounds a narrative between black Britain and the political geographies of the Cold War in ways that implicate both spaces into a distinctly neoliberal representational politics. The novel composes a narrative with ambitious scope and a unique imaginative terrain previously unexamined in black British writing that draws our attention to how such imaginative ventures (as D'Aguiar argued in his 1989 essay) do not necessarily yield a progressive politics.

Automotive Cosmopolitanism: Travelling, Dwelling and the Russian Car in Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists*

> Q: What's the best way of doubling the value of a Lada?
> A: Fill it up with petrol.[10]

If Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself* reimagines 1989 through a generically uncertain mode that conveys the perfunctory nature of its cosmopolitanism, then Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* offers an overtly multi-generic text that confidently renders this moment through a more radically progressive position. Within the diverse and necessarily contingent category of twenty-first-century black British writing, Evaristo remains one of its foremost literary stylists. Her idiosyncratic writing upsets conventional classification in ways that boldly insist upon the inextricable significance between form, content and context. *Soul Tourists*, arguably Evaristo's most formally experimental text, oscillates between poetic verse, literary prose and dramatic script. As a robustly stylized and genre-bending novel, it marks a critical juncture within Evaristo's oeuvre that traces a shift away from singularly experimental modes of writing: the explicit poetic sensibilities within her earlier work, for instance the collection of poetry *Island of Abraham* (1994), and the generically ambivalent novels-in-verse *Lara* (1997; 2009) and *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), transform into the recent, more generically consistent prose novels, *Blonde Roots* (2008), *Mr Loverman* (2013) and the novella *Hello Mum* (2010). For Evaristo, writing in prose had always been a challenge; it had taken her "14 years of trying to write a prose novel" before she was able to produce *Blonde Roots* (Collins 1199). Yet, because of her background in theatre – she graduated from the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama and co-founded the Theatre of Black Women (1982-

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[10] This Lada-inspired quip comes from the epigraph to Peter Hamilton's "The Lada: A Cultural Icon" (2002).

1989) where she often wrote plays in verse – Evaristo gravitated towards a literary aesthetic wrought through poetic and dramatic forms. In a 2008 interview with Michael Collins, she outlined the difficulties negotiating between poetry and prose, particularly in the process of redrafting *Lara* (1997) from its original prose version:

> I felt that what I loved about writing was embedded in poetry such as linguistic inventiveness, imagistic freedom and the craft of concision and capturing the essence of something as well as paying attention to rhythm and sound. My prose, however, was plain, flat, almost devoid of imagery and rambling. It had no life. I then threw the manuscript (literally) into a bin and started re-working *Lara* as poetry…. *Soul Tourists* … began life as a prose novel just like *Lara*, and just like *Lara* it didn't work as such. I then transformed the novel into what I call a novel-with-verse, which is a novel that juxtaposes prose, poetry, script-like forms and, as it happens, other non-literary forms…. (1199)

Since the prose format seemed to jeopardize Evaristo's "natural poetic voice," *Lara* and *Soul Tourists* became in many ways failed novels that creatively blurred divergent literary genres (Collins 1200). While writing "in-verse" enabled Evaristo to exploit a "linguistic inventiveness" and "imagistic freedom" unavailable in prose (at that time), the "with-verse" nature of *Soul Tourists* suggests the beginnings of a movement away from an altogether poetic mode. The novel's "with-verse" structure – the only one in Evaristo's oeuvre – captures a distinctive aesthetic tangled between prose and poetry, narrative and digression, the literary and the non-literary, making *Soul Tourists* one of her most stylistically disjointed texts.

The generic discrepancies in the novel mirror its preoccupation with discrepant forms of itinerancy, movement and travel. The narrative, which tracks the

digressive journey of Stanley, a Jamaican-English London banker, and Jessie, an orphaned black Yorkshire woman, across southern Europe and parts of the Middle East, follows the peripatetic wanderings of its two main characters during the late 1980s: while Jessie seeks "to be always on the move" (Evaristo, *Soul* 52), Stanley, through the visitations of a diverse range of mixed-raced European ghosts, revels in becoming "a citizen of the world" (222). The various ghosts Stanley encounters – in Clerkenwell, Versailles, Paris, Gibraltar, the Alps, Florence, eighteenth-century Constantinople, and on a bus to Istanbul – less haunt and unsettle than energize, delight and enlighten him about histories of black travel and travellers. The erratic presence of the ghosts, who speak in prose, in verse and between blank pages, range from the ninth century Iraqi musician, poet and teacher Zaryab, to the nineteenth-century mixed-raced Jamaican-born nurse Mary Seacole. These spectral presences, which persistently interrupt the novel's present, alongside the meandering car-bound love affair between Stanley and Jessie, produce a restless text that provocatively engages with its own, politically fraught, historical context. Even the novel's representation of history remains discrepant, as the imaginative archive of black itinerancy offered by the ghosts conflict with the more subtle yet subversive examination of the narrative's Cold War context.

Soul Tourists, like Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself*, remains one of the few contemporary black British texts that not only explores the geopolitical consequences of the Cold War but that is also largely set outside the boundaries of Britain. Yet, while reviewers lauded *A Shadow of Myself* as proffering a new and progressive reimagining of Europe (particularly in its engagement with Eastern Europe), Evaristo's pan-European novel was generally regarded as more unusual: new but disappointing in its stylistic indulgences. Responding to the novel's

"sprawling," "maddening" and "erudite" style, Lloyd Evans deemed *Soul Tourists* an "honourable failure," which broached "strange" and "fresh territory" through its "medley of letters, shopping lists, burst of blank verse and other sundry experiments" (10). Tom Gatti read much of the novel's "bold" yet so-called perfunctory engagement with history as a "wasted opportunity" (11). Sarah Adams also remarked upon the "ambitious" "scope" of the novel, but was nonetheless left "hankering after the more exuberant terrain of Evaristo's previous verse novels." Lucy Atkins clinches the spirit of these reviews in her suggestion that "some readers will undoubtedly find all the hopping between poetry and prose, viewpoints and time and place too bitty and un-satisfying" (45). Distracted by the unsettling "with-verse" nature of Evaristo's text, reviewers curiously ignored its serious engagement with the Cold War while privileging a stylistically burdened, depoliticized reading of the text. In contradistinction to *A Shadow of Myself,* reviews of *Soul Tourists* focused on the playful aspects of the narrative which appeared to offer a light-hearted exploration of black history through a "picaresque road movie in print" (A. Sewell 22). The disjointed narrative effectively obfuscated for reviewers much of the more radical and far-reaching implications within the text.

However, the purportedly "bitty" aesthetics of *Soul Tourists*, which have yet to garner sustained critical attention, importantly chart the resonant ways in which the form, content and context of the narrative interact. The dissatisfaction caused by Evaristo's formal tactics reveals one of the ways in which the text revisions a form of discrepant cosmopolitanism that relies upon an assemblage of what appear to be "bitty" histories. When James Clifford coined the term discrepant cosmopolitanism he had in mind a reimagining of culture through the metaphor of travel, what he termed "traveling cultures" (1992). For Clifford, discrepant cosmopolitanism

signifies the "cross-cutting" of "[u]nresolved historical dialogues between continuity and disruption, essence and positionality, homogeneity and difference" (*Routes* 36). Clifford sought to investigate the critical capacity of refiguring culture through "everyday practices of dwelling *and* traveling"; discrepant cosmopolitanisms are "generate[d]" precisely through the entanglement between local and global histories which bear witness to the seemingly incongruent activities of dwelling and travelling (36). The efficacy of such discrepant cosmopolitanisms, with its emphasis on movement and travel, has understandably provoked much criticism (Cheah, *Inhuman* 2006; Procter 2003). Because Clifford's conception of cosmopolitanism reifies the paradox between dwelling and travelling, its deliberate use of these terms ("traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling") is often read as an uneven balancing act that necessarily elides a more materially grounded analysis of culture (Clifford, *Routes* 36).

Rather than attempting to arbitrate between the contradictions of dwelling and travelling, Evaristo's novel poeticizes a form of *dwelling-in-motion* that counter-intuitively refines both concepts. In capturing forms of movement that challenge the static qualities of dwelling and the motility of travelling, Evaristo proffers an exploration of black Britishness in the late 1980s that attempts to creatively unbind itself from the physical boundaries of Britain. Where *A Shadow of Myself* figured the easy mobility of its characters as a consequence of a distinctly post-Cold War neoliberal cosmopolitanism, *Soul Tourists* engages with the concept of movement (or lack-there-of) in ways that alert us to a poetics of (im)mobility keen on finding new, more politically attentive, ways of seeing the world. The novel's engagement with the imaginative geographies of Cold War (in Europe and particularly the Middle East) is crucially mediated by its use of the Russian Lada, which enables a

materially framed dramatization of the "East" "West" divisions of late 1980s. Through a phenomenological investigation of (auto)mobility the text forges what I deem to be an automotive cosmopolitanism that translates the motility of dwelling-in-motion into opportunities for cross-cultural, cross-temporal and cross-material encounters for its characters. This articulation of an automotive cosmopolitanism provocatively revises Clifford's notion of discrepant cosmopolitanism by focusing on an ethics and politics of mobility that considers the cultural significance of the material world.

While the issues raised in Clifford's seminal essay "Traveling Cultures" may seem dated, his conceptualization of culture through travel, as we shall soon see, continues to provoke heated debates within critical studies of cosmopolitanism and globalization.[11] For our current purposes, Clifford's essay remains notable through the ways it creatively constructs a methodology of reading history informed by intersecting issues of race and discrepant travel. One of Clifford's major concerns is to delink travel from a series of associations that connect the term to "European, literary, male, bourgeois, scientific, [and] heroic … meanings and practices" (*Routes* 33). In order to unravel these associations, the figure of the "non-white" traveller functions as a means to explore neglected modes of mobility:

> Victorian bourgeois travellers, men and women, were usually accompanied by servants, many of whom were people of color. These individuals have never achieved the status of "travelers." Their experiences, the cross-cultural links they made, their different access to the societies visited – such encounters seldom find serious

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[11] "Traveling Cultures" was originally presented at the 1990 Cultural Studies conference in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, then published in the follow-up 1992 collection of essays *Cultural Studies*, and later republished in Clifford's classic 1997 text *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.

representation in the literature of travel…. For in the dominant discourses of travel, a non-white person cannot figure as a heroic explorer, aesthetic interpreter, or scientific authority. (33)

By accounting for these forgotten representations, Clifford enacts a form of methodological cosmopolitanism – to amend a concept from Ulrich Beck (2004)[12] – shaped by a reading of mobility that exposes unconsidered transcultural and transnational networks, one that is not dissimilar to Paul Gilroy's notion of the black Atlantic (1993). Clifford privileges travel in ways that remain attentive to discrepant regimes of travelling, whether exploratory, recreational, violent or coerced. Through this method, it is often the "non-white" traveller that facilitates, and becomes a cipher for, an investigation into discrepant histories of travelling. As such, the critical energy of this methodology is ultimately produced by the discrepancy itself: the neglected, disjointed and incompatible histories of movement it attempts to piece together.

Evaristo rehearses facets of Clifford's methodological cosmopolitanism, particularly through her creative work. In her 2008 essay "CSI Europe," she confesses that her "primary interest in Europe is its black history" because these are "[t]he hidden histories … still waiting to be sourced by creative enterprises" (6). Like Clifford, Evaristo attempts to chart the movement of racialized historical figures, often travellers, who have been "absen[t]" or "invalidate[d]" in the history "of the world's Great White Continent" (3) – she terms this method a "literary archaeology" (Hooper 4). As Evaristo admits, her work is continually "enriched and

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[12] Beck defines methodological cosmopolitanism as an outlook "which replaces the … prevailing ontology and imaginary of the nation-state" with an interpretive alternative that moves beyond such limiting boundaries (17). This inclination to identify a methodology that de-historicizes the nation as a foundational ground of analysis coincides with Clifford's investigation into discrepant modes of travel and cosmopolitanism.

captivated by the multiple histories unearthed by researchers digging out that which has been lost, forgotten or deliberately overlooked" ("CSI Europe" 3). She cites, for instance, the black American Arctic traveller Matthew Henson (1866-1955) whose discovery and exploration of the North Pole has been severely undervalued – a history Clifford also excavates in his own work.[13] Evaristo highlights as well the vital recovery work in Mike Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself*, which "covers new terrain, in particular the history of African students in Russia during communism" (5). By aligning her writing with Phillips' overtly historical crime thriller, Evaristo draws attention to the way in which her creative work also "covers new terrain" in animating unacknowledged histories of black travel and movement in Europe. This "literary archaeology" exposes a critical historical consciousness that remains significantly shaped by the realm of the creative. Like Phillips, Evaristo engages with history in service of a greater agenda that seeks to recover "invalidate[d]" pasts and "absen[t]" stories.

It might seem, then, that the fixation on mobility in *Soul Tourists* – the purported "picaresque road movie in print" – functions as a means to thematize notions of discrepant travel. The novel, for one, unhinges the term travel from its supposed white "European, literary, male, bourgeois, scientific, [and] heroic" nexus of meanings. The main characters in the text are two black travellers that remain the central "explorers" and "aesthetic interpreters" of their journey across Europe. The "traveling cultures" constructed within the novel entangle Stanley and Jessie's European excursion in the late 1980s with the centuries-long histories of the ghosts that visit Stanley. These histories are anachronistic (the ghosts do not appear in any

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[13] There are now numerous studies tracing Henson's exploration throughout the North Pole. S. Allen Counter's *North Pole Legacy: Black, White, Eskimo* (1991) is a notable text in this respect as it recounts Counter's journey to Greenland in an attempt to recover Henson's contribution and legacy to the expedition.

chronological order), at times insinuated (for instance, in the novel's tracing of Louise Marie-Thérèse's royal lineage), and, as Evaristo herself points out, playfully irreverent.[14] The ghosts discrepantly inhabit various routes of travel that often unmoor them from their national and local spaces. We meet Alexander Pushkin not in Russia but eighteenth-century Constantinople. This geographic inaccuracy enables the novel to mark Pushkin's connection to his great-grandfather – the African-born Major-General Abram Petrovich Gannibal, who was bought as a slave in the Ottoman Empire before rising in the ranks to become a nobleman in Imperial Russia – while conveniently facilitating Stanley's Turkish and Ottoman encounters with Pushkin, Gannibal, and earlier on a bus, Mary Seacole.

While discrepant travel appears to be the dominant trope of the novel, I want to suggest that it is dwelling, or rather dwelling-in-motion, that offers a more precise rendering of the ways in which the text depicts the motility of its narrative. We can gloss evidence of this in the critical responses to *Soul Tourists* that seem, at first, to examine exclusively how travel operates in the novel. John McLeod, for instance, compellingly reads the discrepant itinerancy within the novel as fostering a distinctive "spatial synchronicity," and as a consequence, a "polycultural consciousness" embedded within the disjointed sensibility of the text ("Transcontinental Shifts" 171). Here, "spatial synchronicity" appears to be a contradictory effect of movement – the term plays upon the tension between the novel's representation of discrepant travel and the paradoxically harmonious moments enabled by this discrepancy. But instead of spotlighting the juxtaposition between travelling and dwelling, discrepancy and synchronicity, McLeod's point

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[14] In an interview with Mani Rao of the *South China Morning Post*, Evaristo revealed that she "enjoy[ed] being irreverent about the sacred cows of our history," referring, of course, to the novel's imaginative attempt at tracing Queen Charlotte's purported mixed-raced heritage (5).

hints at the more subtle ways the narrative crucially dwells (or pauses) in movement. By re-routing the journeys of Pushkin, Gannibal and Stanley in eighteenth-century Constantinople, the narrative forces these characters to dwell together in a specific historical moment and geographic terrain. Travelling becomes less important than the ways in which these characters collectively linger in both time and space.

The intersection between various modes of mobility represented in the novel (driving, wandering, haunting) forge these moving dwelling spaces. When Stanley and Jessie negotiate the treacherously icy roads of the Alps in their Lada Niva, they drive through Hannibal's legendary military campaign from Iberia over the Alps and into northern Italy (Evaristo, *Soul* 179). While the Lada struggles to stay on course, close to "freewheeling" down the mountain, so too does Hannibal's army who have reached a blockade of rocks along their path (180). These two discrepant journeys converge to facilitate a moment of temporal and spatial harmony. As Hannibal finally appears in front of Stanley, he tells us: "history ceased to exist. We were in the same place. We were in the same time" (180). At the level of content, this temporal pause conveniently allows Stanley to reach out to Hannibal for help, which he cryptically provides: soon after, the road flattens and Stanley and Jessie reach the bottom of the mountain. But while the novel is obviously keen to highlight the mobile entanglement of these two black travellers, it is rather in this moment of dwelling-in-motion (not exclusively travelling) that they come together. For all her emphasis on history, Evaristo constructs an occasion in which time and space no longer seem to matter. The novel forces this moment of dwelling-in-motion (within the moving car), as a means to open physical and metaphysical opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural and cross-temporal connections. Through this mobile

dwelling, Hannibal's history becomes unfixed and un-relegated from the past as it merges into Stanley's consciousness.

By directing attention to the varied ways the narrative dwells in motion, we can begin to attend to the complexities within the novel's engagement with cosmopolitanism. Much of the criticism surrounding Clifford's discrepant cosmopolitanism focuses on the ways in which the metaphor of travel assumes a transformative potential at the expense of more materially informed sites of local and national dwelling. For Pheng Cheah, cosmopolitan thinkers like Clifford and Homi Bhabha refigure globalization in terms of "hybrid, radical cosmopolitanisms that attest to the ethico-political inefficacy of the nation-state" (*Inhuman* 82). Because Clifford attempts to disassociate cosmopolitanism from privileged notions of mobility and travel – looking instead to more neglected (i.e. discrepant) "non-white" travellers – he "obscures the material dynamics of nationalism in uneven globalization": the "chronotope of traveling culture does not give equal time to the tenacity of national dwelling" (82; 91). As Cheah argues, the equally cosmopolitan movements of transnational capital are effectively elided in discrepant cosmopolitanism in ways that de-materialize culture. For Cheah, the necessarily transcendental logic of these "new cosmopolitanisms," inflected, in this case, by postcolonial and cultural studies, wilfully overlooks the finitude of human existence in its attempt to construct exaggerated claims of global solidarity located in the abstract world of mobility (80). In many ways, Cheah's critique of Clifford and Bhabha offers a serious roadblock for contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism, which have conventionally seen the nation and nationalism as its diametric opposites. The "aporia" of our "current conjuncture," according to Cheah, is that "nationalism cannot be transcended by cosmopolitan forms of solidarity no matter

how pathological it may appear in its ineradicably oppressive moments" (104). The suggestion that cosmopolitanism cannot be actualized outside the nation works to both credit the materiality of national spaces and the ways in which global capitalism circumscribes supra-national modes of belonging. For Cheah, it is "ethically imperative" to reconsider the nation as an avenue to garner cosmopolitan consciousness (105).[15] A focus on travel cannot negate the ways in which the synchronicities of movement remain mediated by national boundaries and transnational capital.

In his examination of postwar black British cultural production, James Procter offers a more oppositional critique of Clifford's discrepant cosmopolitanism. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, Procter's *Dwelling Places* writes against what he sees as the "deterritorialising tendencies of diaspora discourse," which both Clifford and Bhabha have contributed (3). Procter argues that while contemporary diaspora studies have been largely influenced by the located politics within black British cultural studies, in particular with the work of Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy, these very studies have grossly neglected the creative and cultural politics of dwelling and place. The fixation with "traveling cultures" in diaspora studies, while important, has produced dominating discourses of "post-national" "placelessness" (4) in ways that have conceptualized diasporic communities themselves as "largely … detached from the local, material landscapes in which they have 'settled'" (13). Like Cheah, Procter reads Clifford's cosmopolitanism as a

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[15] In his discussion of nationalism, Cheah remains particularly interested in postcolonial and popular nationalisms within the global South. Because of the nature of uneven globalization (for instance, through predatory global structural adjustment policies), Cheah likens today's postcolonial nationalisms alongside the decolonization movements of the 1960s. To read nationalism in this context as somehow working against an "emancipatory cosmopolitan consciousness" is to ignore the material realities of contemporary globalization (*Inhuman* 105). While Cheah specifically refers to postcolonial nationalism in his critique of Clifford and Bhabha, his thinking remains provocative and relevant for our purposes here.

move that potentially de-materializes located cultural experiences. In response, Procter privileges sites of dwelling – "a house, a home, a territory" – and the activity of dwelling – "to linger, to settle, to stay" – as a means to critique these "non-place-based solidarit[ies]" (14). While Procter does not articulate his preoccupation with dwelling in cosmopolitan terms, his thinking aligns with much of Cheah's suggestion that forms of global solidarity cannot be understood outside "locality, region and nation" (14). Cosmopolitanism, for Procter, signifies a specifically male-oriented and elitist cultural practice that is associated with more "worldly" black British writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips and Salman Rushdie (15). These "cosmopolitan celebrities" (a term, as we already have seen, Procter borrows from Timothy Brennan) bring to the fore the notion of privilege that separates the differences between practices of cosmopolitanism and the more grounded politics of location informed by Britain's continually devolving diasporic communities (184).

Cheah and Procter importantly remind us that notions of dwelling, whether local, regional or national, constitute the material conditions of cosmopolitanism; that is to say, an "ethical" cosmopolitanism concerned particularly with neglected experiences of travel and mobility, cannot be imagined outside the dwelling spaces it appears to transcend. Materiality and dwelling become interlinked here in ways that connect the realm of the material – the physical, concretized, finite conditions of everyday life – with local and located spatial practices. Dwelling is privileged as a means to enable a more situated or rooted cosmopolitanism attentive to its contamination by global capital. *Soul Tourists* disturbs however any strict or innate connection between dwelling and materiality. Cultivated by the experimental aesthetics of the text, the notion of dwelling becomes refigured throughout the novel as concomitantly physical and metaphysical, concrete and flexible, situated and in

motion. Without sacrificing the grounding politics of dwelling, the novel manages to emphasize place without becoming bound by it. Dwelling places are poetically rendered as a means to index characters within a specific historical moment but in ways that refuse to confine them to calcified locations and notions of the past.

One of the most vividly poetic scenes in the novel navigates through the run-down home of Stanley's father. Situated in the 1980s industrial space of the Isle of Dogs, the decrepit state of Clasford Williams' house reflects his own deteriorating health, with its roof of "ill-matched tiles," "black and fissured" window-panes, and "[t]he stench of warm urine" (Evaristo, *Soul* 3-4). Clasford's decaying home represents a stubborn dwelling space, almost completely static in its lack of change and movement. His "new bed remains in its plastic sheath. The new bath stands upended in the other empty bathroom. Clothes spill out of scuffed suitcases" (4). Clasford's house becomes in many ways a caricature of dwelling – a grotesque "inferno" that depicts a condition of stalled and rigid immovability (7). Here, dwelling is delineated in its extremity: Clasford is not lingering but dying. His steadfast refusal to move, even out of his chair, marks his anxious existence as a first generation Jamaican migrant. "*We doan belong ina this country,*" Clasford always reminds Stanley, "*we doan belong*" (19). Compensating for his un-belonging, Clasford becomes stuck and stagnant and entirely confined within his home.

The with-verse nature of Evaristo's text, however, denies Clasford a fixed dwelling space, as the novel lyrically disintegrates the materiality of his home. As Stanley wades through the garbage of his father's house, the narrative begins to dislocate and fragment; formally, paragraphs detach from each other while sentences become fluidly enjambed. As the text moves into an experimental mode, Stanley imagines his father and his home in oceanic terms. The messy, cluttered, urine-

soaked one-storey terraced house mutates into a deep-sea abyss, where "floating net curtains" transform into the tentacles of Sea Wasps and diarrhoea into Sea Cucumbers (9). Clasford becomes unmoored, unanchored, and de-materialized as he disappears underneath the "continental shelf" (9). While the novel articulates the specific material conditions of Clasford's home, with its explicit griminess and geographical and temporal locatedness (Isle of Dogs, 1987), it becomes in the end a means to unfix Clasford who is left both "nowhere" and "somewhere" (10). Dwelling does not become a space that reiterates a grounding materiality, but rather a fluid place that puts in motion a new immaterial relationship between Stanley and his father, one that Stanley can resource later in the novel.

In the following chapter, the narrative shifts from the dilapidating condition of Clasford's house to the ultra-clean whiteness of Stanley's Blackheath flat. Stanley's upscale home is overwhelmingly described in luxurious yet bare terms. His flat is entirely decorated in white: "[b]one white, white lead, blond, *blanc d'argent*, *blanc de fard*, *blanc fixe*, antimony white, titanium white, strontium white, Paris white, zinc oxide, zinc sulphide" (11). His floorboards are "snow-white," his cushions "flake-white," and the "occasional wooden table" is "painted off-white" (11). Unlike Clasford who is burdened by "a tower of old boxes" filled with "official documents," Stanley's flat contains no trace of his past (6). There are no "ornaments or adornments" – no "books … letters, photos, sentimental mementoes," no "plants" (11). Besides the "occasional deviant indulgence: a single Van Gogh sunflower in a slim glass vase," there is almost nothing in Stanley's home (11). This emptiness prefigures Stanley's resistance to dwelling in strictly fixed or located ways. He styles his home as if it were a "moving cloud" with a floor so white it is "hardly there at all" (11). Stanley evokes an almost wilful un-belonging, a desire to be disconnected

from the gritty world around him. He figures the materiality of his flat in less physical than metaphysical terms; it becomes a vacant, idealized space, seemingly unburdened from the strains of history.

While the novel liquefies the fixity of Clasford's dwelling place, it paradoxically works to ground Stanley's blanched living space. Evaristo deftly situates Stanley's flat in the famously restored Paragon, which was originally designed by the British architect Michael Searles in the nineteenth century. Searles, described as the "first local architect to make genuinely original contribution to the architecture of South London," created "ambitious" and "elegant" buildings, often using his trademark motif of Tuscan colonnades (Cherry 53). Charles Bernard Brown restored the Georgian style terraces of the Paragon in the 1950s, converting them to prosperous up-market flats. The novel reminds us of this history in a short historical blurb about the building: "A model of supreme excellence, it was completed in 1807…" (12). Even the Paragon's location in Blackheath, a name which stems from the Old English words "dark soil," indicates how the text consciously locates Stanley's flat in the *terra firma* of London's landscape.[16] Yet, while Stanley's home is given specific historical and material dimensions, Evaristo's clever use of Searles' architectural legacy furthers the caricature of dwelling in the novel. Because the Paragon signifies a space of wealth, and in its very name, an ideal, it serves to reify Stanley's metaphysical and sanitized conception of his home. While the narrative makes sure to delineate the historical background of Stanley's flat, it concomitantly circumvents its own historical boundaries by reminded us of the abstracted nuances of Stanley's indulgently blank dwelling place.

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[16] For an extensive historical account of Blackheath see Neil Rhind's *The Heath: A Companion Volume to Blackheath Village and Environs* (1987).

In challenging the notion of dwelling as necessarily constrained by its physical materiality, the novel illustrates its resistance to an exclusively located poetics and politics of black Britishness. By no means is dwelling insignificant; Evaristo places her characters in very specific historical and geographic settings. To ignore this fact would be to misread the detailed historical consciousness of much of her work. However, with *Soul Tourists*, Evaristo offers a counter-argument to Procter's nationally and locally framed privileging of the dwelling place. Enabled by the novel's genre-bending experimentalism, dwelling offers transnational opportunities for its characters that remain radically flexible in both time and space.

Jessie's Clerkenwell flat is an apt example of this. With a "large map of the world" "[s]ellotaped on to the scuffed wall," her room says "impermanence – that the person residing within could pack up and leave within the hour" (57). Her small flat negotiates between the physical and the metaphysical worlds of the novel, as it becomes one of the many gateways that accommodate the spectral presences within the narrative. This dwelling place not only facilitates Stanley's first encounter with ghosts (Shakespeare and his "Dark Lady"), but also highlights the ways dwelling as a physical activity can become spontaneously unfixed and dislocated. Sites of dwelling in *Soul Tourists* no longer represent the struggling London basements and bedsits of Sam Selvon's and George Lamming's articulation, the provincial suburbias of Meera Syal's and Hanif Kureishi's work, nor the "more kitsch, working-class tourism" in the 1990s literary representations of Butlin's, Blackpool and the Lake District (Procter 4). Because Evaristo moves away from more realist forms of writing – which much of Procter's study focuses upon – her narrative grants

imaginative engagements with history that remain radically dislocated, flexible and untimely.[17]

Eva Ulrike Pirker, one of the few critics to examine the historical setting of the novel, has however found Evaristo's engagement with the past deeply problematic. As Pirker tells us:

> the way in which Evaristo goes about sketching her fictional Europe of 1989 is more than reductive. Pushkin, the Russian icon, is not encountered in Moscow, Petersburg, or even Odessa, but transmitted to Constantinople to fit the traveller's route. The novel that is praised as dusting down the "history of old and new Europe" on the back cover leaves out the entire geographical space of the "Eastern bloc" that other writers such as [Mike Phillips in *A Shadow of Myself*] … took pains to explore. Written as a historical novel that is set in the very year that changed the face of Europe, its omission is a significant one. It goes to show that what used to be the "Eastern bloc" still seems to be a no-go area in the imagination of many Western creatives black and white. ("The Unfinished Revolution" 140)

Like Tom Gatti, Pirker questions the historical validity of the novel and its representation of the Cold War. Historical inaccuracies (which are undoubtedly scattered throughout the narrative) coupled with Evaristo's seeming silence concerning the more political relevant (i.e. Eastern) imaginative geographies of the Cold War, appear to produce a text that engages with the past in dubiously depthless ways. I have been arguing that these inaccuracies reflect the novel's brazenly discrepant aesthetics. The itinerant formal features of the text consciously work

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[17] While Procter's study explores a range of genres (literary and non-literary through photography, film and painting), the majority of the literary texts examined are primarily realist in form and content. Although, it is important to emphasize that Procter does engages with other of genres and styles of writing, including the poetic, modernist, and magic realist.

against notions of conventional historicity as a means to create new poetic possibilities for its black British characters. While Pirker targets the exclusion of Eastern European spaces within the novel's Cold War context, she concomitantly neglects other politically potent geographies relevant to the narrative's late 1980s frame. These alternative spaces – which in the novel traverse pertinent sites in the Middle East – mark not only the text's unique global dispensation but also its move *away* from Europe. For Evaristo, there are other overlooked geographies and Iron Curtains to explore that have also been "no-go area[s]" for many "Western creatives."

Indeed, the novel's engagement with the off-roads, highways and borderlands of Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Kurdistan, Syria, and Iran evidence a conspicuously unexplored terrain within contemporary black British writing. As Stanley and Jessie "slip" into the Middle East, they admit: "we know little about the current politics of this part of the world…. We do know that the Iran-Iraq War ended over a year ago, which was also just about when I [Stanley] last read a newspaper" (Evaristo, *Soul* 266). By identifying the limited connection between these characters and the Middle Eastern lands they travel through, Evaristo effectively begins to embed their story within the spaces and context of the narrative. In its shift to the Middle East, the novel is able to place its characters within a nexus of issues not commonly associated with the Cold War but constellated by the year 1989: the Rushdie Affair, the settling of the Iran-Iraq War, and presciently, in the world of the novel, the beginnings of the Gulf War (1990-1991). With Jessie's reference to the Rushdie Affair – "what with all the diplomatic souring it means Iran's off limits to us Brits" – *Soul Tourists* facilitates opportunities for a reconnection between black Britons and the so-called Muslim world, one that was severely fractured by the fallout of the

Affair (261). As Jessie dons a headscarf and Stanley attempts to read the Arabic road signs in Baghdad, the novel demonstrates the ways in which it ventures to conjugate its black British characters with the histories and geographies of the Middle East.

The entangling of these histories (with Stanley hoping for a visitation from Nebuchadnezzar) and encountering of such "no-go area[s]" is made possible only because of the car. As Jessie and Stanley, on their way to Iraq, drive through "[p]uddles of oil" that "lie with the quiet patience of landmines," the narrative explicitly foregrounds the neo-imperial petrol politics that have destructively dominated much of the late-twentieth and twenty-first century (266). With the fall of communism and the Berlin Wall, *Soul Tourists* remains attentive to the advent and domination of global capitalism precisely through the trope of the car. The novel marks the end of the Cold War through an automotive journey that traces a geopolitical shift from Eastern Europe to the Middle East without de-emphasizing the continued importance of the so-called "Eastern bloc." The way in which the car registers the automotive experiences of its characters delineates how the text figures these geographies within an imperious petrol-conscious world order. Driving along the main road to Iraq, Stanley tells us that "[t]ankers lie upturned on each side of [the road] … like garrotted skeletons with disembowelled bellies, which the wilderness of grass, bark and bracken has long since claimed its own" (266). As the Lada drives over the "vertebra of this long narrow country," Stanley and Jessie encounter this landscape, strewn with decrepit oil tankers, as if it were a living being (266-67). The inanimate car activates views of the road that renders the discarded tankers into decomposing and butchered bodies. Becoming emblems of both oil and death, these tankers not only presciently register the neo-imperial conflicts that are soon to shape this region but also important cross-material encounters between the Russian car and

the tankers which provocatively intertwine two very different Cold War "Eastern" geographies. The animation of these tankers mirrors the ways Jessie's Lada Niva, nicknamed Matilda, becomes as much of a character in the novel as Stanley and Jessie. These anthropomorphized tankers mark how Evaristo's narrative persistently turns to non-human encounters that potentially enable unexpected cross-cultural interactions.

Because of the crucial presence of the car in the novel, it is rather surprising that neither critics nor reviewers have yet to interrogate, or mention, the significance of Jessie's Lada Niva. Imported to the UK in the 1970s, the 4x4 Niva (the so-called "true people's car") was an inexpensive and popular mode of travel for many British consumers (Gatejel 147). Cars necessarily carry certain national resonances, as Tim Edensor usefully suggests, making the British introduction of Russian cars during the Cold War a symbolically peculiar moment. Within the UK, two cars in particular came to represent the Britishness of the car industry – the Rolls-Royce and the Mini. They both "embod[ied] specific values which continued to articulate … distinctive notions of Britishness, often inflected with class" (Edensor 104). Through the Rolls and the Mini, Edensor argues, a kind of car-conscious national identity began to emerge in Britain from the 1950s onwards. By refiguring notions of the "self" and "other" through the commodity of the car, the Rolls became an "evocatio[n] of pride" "in contradistinction to the … Russian Ladas and East German Trabants [which] used to be routinely mocked by comedians": "non-British motor imports" became, at least in popular culture, technologically "othered" (105). As Peter Hamilton poignantly puts it, Lada's effectively "stood for another world, an alternative universe of motoring (197). It is telling, then, that Evaristo should choose to place her two black British characters in a Russian (i.e. non-British) car, during

the politically potent latter years of the Cold War. By marking her characters in subtly outer-national terms here, Evaristo places them in a unique position to experience "another world" away from the confines of Britain and Englishness. Through their Russian car, these black travellers become figuratively (and materially) unmoored from their nationality.

For Paul Gilroy, it is essential for black communities to associate themselves with productive modes of movement that "seek new ways of becoming present to one another amidst the techno-cultural ferment of the information age" ("Driving While Black" 85). Gilroy notably evokes the chronotope of the ship in his pioneering study of the black Atlantic as a means to trace such transnational formations and triangulated oceanic connections otherwise ignored. He productively articulates the image of the ship as a "living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" (*Black Atlantic* 4; 12). Yet, while he champions the ship as a generative space, of what I term here, dwelling-in-motion, Gilroy remains suspicious of the (auto)motive capabilities of the car. According to Gilroy, the activity of "driving while black" enunciates an "anti-political" and "immoral consumerism" that demonstrates how black communities have destructively responded to consumer culture ("Driving While Black" 83). With specific reference to African-American popular culture, Gilroy argues that the private car functions as a seductive fetish object that poses "fundamental problems of solidarity and translocal connection" (85). Because the car remains deeply embedded within unsustainable regimes of global capitalism, it carries with it the inevitable power to "depoliticize, disorient and mystify" (85). The car obliterates organic and oppositional forms of belonging alongside any kind of progressive politics. The car and car cultures, for Gilroy, articulate instead the ways

in which consumer products sold as enabling freedom of movement, in actuality, obfuscate it.[18]

The depiction and use of the Russian car in *Soul Tourists* challenges Gilroy's polemic on car cultures by refusing to figure the Lada as a destructive consumer product with no possibility for a meaningful politics. Rather, the car works to re-politicize, orient and demystify the novel's engagement with history. Through the Lada, Evaristo implicates her black British characters within the ideological battles between the "East" and the "West." Evaristo, in effect, situates her characters on an everyday terrain within the geopolitical fissures of the Cold War, particularly by deftly engaging them with the contradictory politics of, what Lewis H. Siegelbaum has dubbed, the "Socialist car." As Siegelbaum tells us, "[t]he Socialist Car was more than the metal, glass, upholstery, and plastic from which the Ladas, Dacias, Trabants and other still extant and erstwhile models were fabricated" (2). These cars became the literal materialization of the "East"/"West" tensions during the Cold War. In the late 1960s, the Soviet Union began recognizing the need for private automotive ownership and thus expanded its production to re-signify the so-called capitalist car "as a sign of the superiority of socialism" (Volti 131). Battling with "certain ideologically driven notions [that] questioned its appropriateness to the socialist project," the Ladas, Dacias, and Trabants soon became both communist and capitalist-inflected modes of travel (Siegelbaum 2). By making the central car of the novel Russian, especially during the Cold War, Evaristo complicates the assumed connection between cars and capitalism by suggesting an "alternative universe of

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[18] Gilroy returns to his argument concerning private automotivity (i.e. cars) and the moral capacity of black Atlantic cultures (with particular attention to contemporary U.S. culture) in the first chapter of his book *Darker than Blue* (2010).

motoring" manufactured through alternate economic regimes of production (Hamilton 197).

Indeed, Evaristo's narrative use of the car contradicts Gilroy's near-wholesale critique of car culture and black driving. Within *Soul Tourists*, it is the itinerant movement of the car that *enables* "translocal connection" and "solidarity" between Stanley and his physical and metaphysical environment. The text's use of automobility literalizes its preoccupation with forms of dwelling-in-motion that emphasize place without necessarily being constrained by it. Here, automobility becomes figured as more of "a phenomenology" – "a set of ways of experiencing the world" (Böhm 3). Through the car, the novel explicitly articulates its automotive cosmopolitanism, one that maps discrepant and mechanized modes of movement alongside distinctive cross-cultural and cross-material interactions. The politics and poetics of location, so often referenced within black British studies, are effectively set in motion and unmoored. Because of its phenomenological investigation of dwelling-in-motion, *Soul Tourists* forges an automotive cosmopolitanism precisely through the ways it self-consciously tropes the car. The car becomes, in many ways, a cipher in the text that traces and shapes the characters engagement with new cultural contexts throughout their journey.

This particular modality of an automotive cosmopolitanism, which attempts to read the ways cars translate a certain view of the world, also importantly recognizes the ecological consequences of the activity of automobility. If we understand the Lada as registering the corrosive petrol politics of the post-Cold War era, then we must also acknowledge that the Lada necessarily remains implicated within this politics. Known for its remarkably poor fuel efficiency and designed to function "on the cheapest and worst fuel," the Lada Niva remains a remarkably

ironic choice of vehicle to call out unsustainable or unethical global practices
(Hamilton 195). This tempting, but somewhat paralyzing position requires us to
question the symbolic use of the car (particular the Lada) within the narrative.
Instead, however, I want to suggest, alongside Mimi Sheller, that there remains a
different ethics of automobility that the novel resources, one that is garnered through
the neglected "affective and embodied relations between people, machines and
spaces of mobility and dwelling" (221). For Sheller, these "kinaesthetic investments
(such as walking, bicycling, riding a train or being in a car)" have the ability to
"orient us toward the material affordances of the world around us" (228). Sheller
privileges the sensory experiences which entangle the human with the car; and in
doing so, attempts to delineate the ways in which automobility "transforms the way
we sense the world" (228). Sheller's focus on the kinaesthetic elements of
automobility – that is, a sensorial awareness of how the body moves and is moved by
the car – offers a productive framework that both values the significant impact of
automotive culture while attempting to refigure the ethical dilemmas surrounding car
consumption. These kinaesthetic properties enable a more flexible and progressive
means of investigating how we might understand the novel's peculiar emphasis on
automotive movement.

Through both its content and form, *Soul Tourists* remains undeniably
entrenched within a distinctive automotive sensibility that flags such kinaesthetic
experiences, even for the reader. The pictorial traffic signs interspersed between
chapters signify a literary motorscape for readers to interpret and follow. Each sign
anticipates the action of the following chapter in ways that warn readers of what to
expect. Take for example the blank page with the sign "i" (for information) that
precedes the novel's table of contents. As readers, we are immediately hailed as

tourists since the novel textually signals the table of contents for us as our tourist centre, one that we can go back to consult. In other instances, the traffic signs indicate a sharp left turn (to indicate a narrative digression), or a merging between characters (for instance, when Stanley is abruptly cornered by the ghost of Alessandro de' Medici, the sixteenth-century Duke of Florence). The traffic signs become in many ways a discursive formation: formally, they articulate a poetics of the road that imitate the logic of automobility. Readers become drivers through the directed guidance of the traffic signs, and the text functions as a narrative vehicle that moves and is moved by the reader. This is a form of dwelling-in-motion for the reader who is constantly moving through the multiple genres and textual motorways of the narrative.

The automotive aesthetics of the novel encourages a readerly kinaesthetic engagement, as we are invited to read the novel in its multiple forms (as poetry, prose, drama, map). As Sheller reminds us, these "kinaesthetic investments," enable a sensorial awareness that alerts us to the material realities and located nature of the car. We can find a poetic representation of this kinaesthetics in Stanley's description of France's Camargue. Stanley articulates here a dwelling-in-motion that narrates an experience with the landscape wrought through the movement of the car. As they drive through the marshlands, Stanley sees:

> Miles of wispy conifer plantations, spines bending with the wind
> in a parade of arbour-aerobics

> Freshly burnt clumps of bulrushes heaped alongside the sinewy
> tongues of canals

> Soft-flowing meadows where hay has yet to be scythed

down into spiked and angry stubble …

Flamingos gather on mud flats, rubbery necks flopped over as
their bills search for food in the shallows (Evaristo, *Soul* 127)

Each of these stanzas registers a specific kinaesthetic experience: the sight of
"arbour-aerobics" and the "[f]lamingos gather[ed] on mud flats," the smell of "burnt
clumps of bulrushes," the feel of "[s]oft-flowing meadows." These sensorial
impressions, while separated into rhythmically diverse stanzas, seamlessly blend into
each other as the trees, bulrushes, canals, meadows and flamingos become poeticized
through Stanley's embodied yet distant interaction with them. Because each stanza
articulates only one aspect of the landscape, the form of the Stanley's poetic
narrative simulates a scenery that is in motion: the various lengths of each stanza
represent an uneven movement through space, while the lush details of each
impression indicate the activity of dwelling in the driver's gaze. The depiction of this
scenery in movement dramatizes the motility of cosmopolitanism in the novel
through the ways in which Stanley dwells in spaces that are concomitantly located,
yet persistently in motion. As Stanley puts it, they are lyrically "[d]riving through a
postcard" (127).

The connection established here between the natural world of the Camargue
and the manufactured world of the car, conflicts with the view of certain critics of
automobility, in particular Raymond Williams, who suggest that cars contaminate
"natural communities" by imposing an artificial modality of "mobile privatisation"
(Williams 184; 188). Williams reads the "windowed shell" of the car as a
mechanized and dehumanizing system of private movement that inhibits (not
liberates) the more communal and "rooted" ways in which everyday social life is

organized (189; 199). The representation of the Lada in *Soul Tourists* offers, however, an alternative mode of understanding automobility that begins to unpack these dichotomies between the artificial capitalistic world of the car and the more organic and communal dwelling spaces it necessarily infringes upon. We can see this in the novel's opening scene which begins with Stanley driving to his father's house. The artificial materiality of the car – its fumes, headlights and windows – is never entirely separated from Stanley himself. Here, in the opening moments of the novel, Stanley and his car merge to become a human-car hybrid. The Blackwall Tunnel converts for them into "birth canal":

> Every week, as I descend into the tunnel's arched, prowling depths, headlights dipped, windows closed because of the damned fumes, I dread the moment when I'm finally pushed out, noiselessly screaming, tiny fists clenched, eyes all screwed up and gummy, face blue and bruised like a little boxer, into the thundering traffic and toxic air of the Isle of Dogs…. (Evaristo, *Soul* 3)

The "windowed shell" of the car becomes lyrically naturalized and explicitly embodied; it transforms into a mechanical foetus that is "pushed out" from the traffic of the womb-like Tunnel – the figurative communal birth canal for morning commuters. The car kinaesthetically intimates the weekly rebirth of Stanley as he is released into the traffic on the other side. Stanley's merger with his car is less dehumanizing than re-humanizing, as each week he is rendered anew on his way to his father's house. The car, in effect, confuses any separation between the natural and the artificial world; it becomes instead a vehicle or gateway that mediates *between* worlds. It is through the car that we are introduced to Stanley's ability to envision the super-natural, which in this scene, translates the parked car into an

"ocean bed" that "look[s] out" to the "long-forgotten shipwreck" that is his father's home (3).

This activity of automobility shapes a specific form of cosmopolitanism in the novel that enables connections between different historical moments, geographic spaces and cross-cultural occasions. It is through the modality of the automotive that Stanley has one of his first spectral visions: "I vaguely remember … I was a small child … seeing a queue of cars at traffic lights turn into horse-drawn carriages" (138). This ability to see new worlds tellingly begins with a series of cars transforming back into what we might call their historical equivalent, "horse-drawn carriages." Cars, particularly their (auto)mobile movements, activate and provoke Stanley's visions. The nature of his hauntings are then rendered through unsettling moments of dwelling-in-motion: for instance, when Stanley unknowingly converses with Mary Seacole, he is riding a Turkish *dolmuş*. This is why the Russian Lada – entirely overlooked by Evaristo's critics – remains so crucially significant to the narrative of *Soul Tourists*. Not only does it mark an activity of movement that enables Stanley's otherworldly encounters, but it also situates the novel within a discernable Cold War context. The ways in which the Lada traverses the European and Middle Eastern geographies of the late 1980s necessarily implicates these spaces within the geopolitical and geopoetic consequences of 1989.

The novel ends with Stanley unable to interpret his uniquely cosmopolitan experiences. He has "digested a small portion of the world" (temporally and spatially) and the world has now "become" him (281). Standing on the edge of the "crystallized shore of the Kuwaiti desert … [t]he blistered fingers of seaweed … entangl[ing] … [his] toes," Stanley inhabits a space implanted on land yet also nearly grasping the moving water of the Persian Gulf (281). Stanley embodies here

the imaginative ways in which Evaristo consistently attempts to articulate her black British characters as both located and on the move. Between the fixity of the land and the motility of the water, Evaristo grants Stanley multiple modalities of movement from which to navigate his life.

Conclusion

In their own ways, both Phillips and Evaristo attempt to enunciate a poetics of outer-national existence for their black (British) characters: while Stanley hovers on the edge of the coast unable "to return home" (282), George leaves his family for an unknown place, "want[ing] to be another person" (Phillips, *A Shadow* 385). These threshold lives capture how each writer deploys a particular politics of representation in their articulation of a distinctly (post)-Cold War cosmopolitanism. Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself* rhetorically stylizes and mimics a modality of representation implicated within discourses of neoliberal cosmopolitanism. His novel flattens (and empties) its Eastern European spaces in the service of depicting a new world order shaped around easy and more liberalized "flows" of movement. Joseph returns home to London with the entire cast of the novel's transnational characters, while George moves on, "want[ing] more than [he] … can ever have," in the hopes of finding his fortunes in this "new world" (386). Evaristo, in contradistinction, turns to the geographies of the Cold War (across Central Europe and the Middle East) to tacitly flag the destructive petrol politics that have consumed these spaces. By poetically scrutinizing the conventional motilities ascribed to travelling and dwelling, she proposes an automotive cosmopolitanism (inspired by the Russian Lada) that

narratologically alerts us to such Cold War political frames while providing unexpected cross-cultural and otherworldly interactions for her characters. In the end, Jessie follows her estranged son to Australia while Stanley boldly waits on the coast of Kuwait for new adventures – by sea, in the air or even on the moon – to take hold of him.

Though both writers articulate a very different politics and poetics of cosmopolitanism grounded by the year 1989, neither is able to imagine their characters (black British or otherwise) *living* within the outer-national spaces they construct. If 1989 constitutes a sign of history that inspires a reimagining of new unities and alliances within these texts (in Eastern Europe and the Middle East), then it appears that such alliances remain fleeting and ephemeral. However, it is precisely within these seemingly perfunctory exchanges that Evaristo, and to some extent Phillips, resist the temptation to restrict their characters to any one dominating space. The "ground" always "shift[s]," as Joseph laments, in ways that insistently provokes new ways of seeing the world (Phillips, *A Shadow* 388). Both Evaristo and Phillips creatively render the "placelessness" that Procter disparages by drawing our attention to an, at times, conservative and problematic politics of location (as we saw with the ending of *A Shadow of Myself*). In the threshold spaces that each of these narratives leave us with (George wanders in the world and Stanley waits for it to come to him), we are offered a deferred sense of what it might involve to meaningfully live in dislocated cosmopolitan spaces.

Conclusion
The Politics of Cosmopolitanism and black British Writing

> We know well enough the pitfalls which open up when we discuss questions to do
> with black British identity. Inevitably we have to be selective and impressionistic.
> Most of all, it's difficult to be both positive and critical.
>
> – Stuart Hall ("Aspirations and Attitude" 38)

This thesis began by positing the conjunction of cosmopolitanism and black British writing as an unacknowledged yet significant intersecting field of investigation. I suggested that there exists a problematic lacuna within the study of black British literatures in the twenty-first century whereby notions of cosmopolitanism are regarded as suspect frames of analysis: any black British text that manages to move beyond its "authentic" locatedness (i.e. from its local, regional or national confines) appears to fundamentally question the political and discursive ground of its formation. The threat of cosmopolitanism proceeds from the assumption that such a discourse necessarily dilutes the politics embedded within black British writing in favour of a depoliticized (or apolitical) post-racial aesthetic worldliness. Cosmopolitanism has been presumed to be a dubious paradigm of analysis – one that advocates an often elitist perpetual displacement – unsuitable to the more situated and civic concerns of black British literatures. Contrariwise, throughout my thesis, I have argued that cosmopolitanism – as a critical praxis and expression of a certain aesthetic modality – productively (and often provocatively) uncovers particular cross-cultural histories within twenty-first century black British texts that necessarily *amplify* their politics. Whether in pejorative or salutatory ways, such texts bear

witness to distinctly literary cosmopolitan sensibilities that are shaped, and indeed constituted by, specific historical moments.

This inextricable relationship between cosmopolitanism and history has informed a central dynamic in my thesis that traces the ways in which twenty-first-century black British texts reimagine particular historical conjunctures as a means of recovering new (or neglected) translocal, outer-national and cross-cultural alliances. While I have read this dynamic as a unique feature of contemporary black British writing, I stopped short of claiming that such literature represents a definitive epochal shift from previous work published before the twenty-first century. There is an important and recognizable change in the work of contemporary black British writers in that they are more inclined to examine imaginaries that move beyond the parameters of black Britain; however, by suggesting that such a change is divorced from preceding twentieth-century writing would be to dangerously overemphasize these differences. The contention that twenty-first-century black British literatures comprise an entirely new category of writing risks nullifying the continuing legacies of black British cultural production pre-2000.

The dialectic that has, thus, developed in this thesis, between the recent past and the present, animates the conflicting nature of the various cosmopolitanisms formulated by the writers I examine. Each writer constructs, what I deem to be, identifiable "signs of history" (1948; 1981/1982; 1989) as a means to both pluralize the narratives (literary or otherwise) that constitute such conjunctures, while also cultivating new cross-cultural possibilities mediated by these moments. The past, in effect, becomes a valuable means through which these writers compose their literary enunciations of cosmopolitanism. Lyotard's conception of "signs of history" establishes a crucial conceptual resource for my thesis, which attends to manifold

articulations of significant historical occasions. It is through the activity of fracturing received history and opening fresh perspectives that the texts analysed here reshape the past in the service of excavating distinctive cosmopolitan affinities and opportunities. The "signs of history" established in this thesis – the arrival of the *Windrush* in 1948, the 1981 inner-city uprisings across the UK coupled with the 1982 Falklands conflict, and the end of the Cold War in 1989 – not only uncover specific, historically framed, articulations of cosmopolitanism (or "cosmopolitan moments" as Robert Fine and Robin Cohen would put it), but also, indispensably, the crucial interconnections between the imaginative field of black British writing and cosmopolitanism (137).

There are a number of points I want to make in this conclusion as a means to consider the underlying consequences of reading black British literature explicitly through the critical frame of cosmopolitanism. Throughout my thesis, cosmopolitanism has come to signify the complicated way in which certain black British writers, at the level of both form and content, (re)activate particular cross-cultural alliances. I have been specifically concerned with tracing the "density of overlapping allegiances" these texts construct "rather than the abstract emptiness of non-allegiance" that often plague discussions of cosmopolitanism (Robbins, "Comparative" 173). The cosmopolitan modes of representation that I have thus been keen to track derive from textual negotiations with different histories and geographies in ways that frequently expose difficult and uncomfortable cultural entanglements.

The variegated "density" of alliances the writers in this thesis have propounded often take shape through overlooked literary forms and counterintuitive narratives. We find, for instance, a nuanced account of 1948 London in James

Berry's purportedly "nostalgic" collection of poetry *Windrush Songs*, which paratactically renders the uneasy intimacies that connect Windrush migrants to those first, unwelcoming faces they encounter (Miller, "Sing Another One"). Alex Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane*, deemed too parochial for some critics, also delineates the discomforts of a new community (re)making itself (Dawes, "Negotiating the Ship"; Ball 2004). In the aftermath of the 1981 Brixton uprisings, the novel envisions a radical coming together of a new Brixtonian community not through local affiliations but rather distinctly outer-national connections (with Ireland and the African diaspora).

Each of these refigured alliances attest, in some ways, to the unattainable ideal of cosmopolitanism; that is to say, much of the literature examined in this thesis explores less the holistic consummation of such allegiances and more their failures or tenuous realizations. Berry's Windrush migrant in "Beginning in a City, 1948" cannot, for example, interact with the occupants of the dosshouse. It is at the formal level that the poetry entangles the circumstances of the migrant with that of the dosshouse's destitute inhabitants. Linton Kwesi Johnson's Penguin Modern Classics text *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* also offers uncertain connections between various communities, particularly those of revolutionary purpose and protest. His 1980s poetry becomes paratextually reshaped by Penguin in ways that tacitly expose these newly meditative textual interconnections and attachments. Driving through the borderlands of the Middle East, Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* likewise suggests certain protean entanglements between her black British characters and the new geographies they traverse. The novel's Russian car cleverly traces these geopoetic interactions – it becomes a crucial cipher in the text that registers

Evaristo's exuberant, multi-generic and necessarily ephemeral construction of outer-national and otherworldly encounters.

While such texts undoubtedly delineate instances of cross-cultural connections, they also alert us to the contingent nature of these connections through their necessarily uncertain, and at times, inoperative articulations. When writers combat this uncertainty by creating narratives that venture to fully realize particular cross-cultural alliances, we find, then, a dilution of such connective densities. Indeed, the texts in this thesis that attempt to comprehensively capture the multiple alliances in their narratives end up conceiving a kind of excess of belonging that reifies "the abstract emptiness of non-allegiance" (Robbins, "Comparative" 173). The literary cosmopolitanism enunciated in these texts becomes an exploration of what it might mean to belong everywhere (yet nowhere): to become, in many ways, a citizen of the world.

We can see this in the three most recognizably "cosmopolitan" novels: Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, and Mike Phillips' *A Shadow of Myself*. Each of these texts features a plurality of narrative perspectives, representations of a multitude of cultures, and a diversity of geographies from around the world. They construct what would appear to be the most pronounced cosmopolitan narratives in this thesis. However, as I have argued, these texts problematically undo much of the significant cross-cultural connections and alliances established within the writing. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that all of these novels place the burden of such connections upon figurations of children (i.e. through baby Michael in *Small Island*, Irie's unborn child in *White Teeth*, and Serge in *A Shadow of Myself*). Within these texts, children become key metaphors in the construction of a conspicuous cosmopolitan narrative. They not only function as a

means to offer narrative closure, but also, as James Wood suggested in relation to *White Teeth*, a form of narrative sacrifice that demonstrates the culmination of the cultural commentaries in the novel. It is through the children that we repeatedly find a conservative politics at work which either questions any attempt at developing meaningful connections with others (for instance, with Irie's purportedly rootless unborn baby), or imposes such connections entirely upon the children – baby Michael unknowingly carries the "secret" of the intimate entanglements between Queenie and Michael (Levy, *Small Island* 529), while the "African, Russian, Czech, German, soon to be Englishman" Serge (Phillips, *A Shadow* 388), becomes the "quintessential citizen of new Europe" (Rupp 285). The complexities embedded within the cross-cultural engagements within these texts effectively become over-signified and simplified for the figure of the child. He or she is burdened with the abstract task of negotiating a form of cosmopolitanism that either flaunts a surplus of attachments or attempts to relinquish their significance.

This thesis has thus uncovered the more progressive cosmopolitanisms within literatures not commonly associated as espousing cosmopolitan ideals. The texts that have captured the predicaments of cosmopolitanism in ways that bear witness to the nuanced difficulties of establishing cross-cultural alliances remain often critically neglected or not conventionally deemed what we might call cosmopolitan. They are not in the order of Berthold Schoene's "cosmopolitan novel," which prescribes the necessity of certain "kaleidoscope" narrative techniques (27). Neither do they adhere to the contention that a single genre (like the novel) maintains a monopoly on forms of cosmopolitan representation. The texts analysed in this thesis confirm that literary versions of cosmopolitanism can be found in a range of genres and styles of writing, from the poetic, to the transparently realist, to the generically-hybrid. Discovering

such cosmopolitan articulations requires close attention to the various modalities of representation uniquely rendered in each text.

This open-ended method of engagement with cosmopolitan literature is precisely what distinguishes my study from other recent investigations into cosmopolitanism and its representation within literary forms (Anderson 2001; Berman 2001; Walkowitz 2006; Friedel 2008; Schoene 2009; Spencer 2011; McCulloch 2012; Cheyette 2013). My thesis, for instance, has not attempted to propound a cosmopolitan hermeneutics that finds in certain black British literatures the ability to "provide … readers with a source of self-knowledge and a cosmopolitan conscience" (Spencer 51). Neither has it sought out texts that stand as "critical exemplars" of a particular imaginative modality of cosmopolitanism (Cheyette xi). I have not argued that certain genres, national paradigms or literary movements – like the postcolonial (Spencer), British (Schoene; McCulloch), or modernist (Walkowitz) – are better equipped to enunciate new ways of thinking beyond (exclusively) national paradigms. Nor have I attempted to valorize a particular canon of writing as an ideal category of cosmopolitan representation.

Rather, what this thesis has ventured to argue is that twenty-first-century black British writing, almost entirely overlooked in the burgeoning field of literary cosmopolitanism, has much to say with regard to how literature can provocatively envision new worldly imaginaries. My examination of these literatures importantly testifies to the multiplicity of representational modes that can potentially garner such worldly perspectives. In turning to theories of cosmopolitanism, it has been my contention that we can unearth novel ways of re-valuing the category of black British writing that remains "both positive and critical" (Hall, "Aspirations and Attitude" 38). Too often criticism of black British literature is preoccupied with the practice of

legitimizing the evaluated works. From the few monographs that have shaped the field, we have inherited readings that predominantly focus on the "positive" transformative qualities of such literatures (Stein 2004) or their necessarily oppositional and located aesthetics (Procter 2003). Explorations of cosmopolitanism, specifically in the study of contemporary black British writing, create the space to recognize a distinctive politics of cosmopolitanism that permits and *invites* critique. Reading Levy, Smith and Phillips through the purview of cosmopolitan criticism has, for example, revealed fresh avenues from which to read these much-celebrated texts that question (what I have suggested to be) their over-wrought depiction of a world beyond black Britain. Cosmopolitanism, as a critical praxis, sanctions then a pertinent invigoration of black British studies that facilitates a critique of both the literature and the scholarship in the field. Recognizing the distinctive cosmopolitanisms within twenty-first-century black British writing ultimately permits critics to better attend to the shifting and, at times, problematic politics and poetics of these texts.

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