A House with two Doors? Creole Nationalism and Nomadism in Multicultural London.

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the limits of liberal discourses such as multiculturalism in an increasing global world. I focus on multicultural London and juxtapose Black British writer, Zadie Smith's novel, *White Teeth* to Stephen Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things*, to underline the multiple intersections between the status of colored immigrants, their descendants, and migrant workers. The thin distinction between citizens and aliens disappears in the film that portrays their overlapping job occupations, spatial proximity, hence shedding light on the continuing significance of race in Britain today. While racism in Smith's liberal view can be combated through claims of citizenship, the film suggests that race, class, immigrant statuses are an integral part of a capitalist system of exploitation. This comparison reveals different conceptualizations of this diverse population, one that is creole and argues for the recognition of diverse citizens' cultures, and another one that transcends national, gender and cultural perimeters.

Contributor:

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'My name is Karim Amir and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care – Englishman I am (though I am not proud of it), from the South London Suburbs and going somewhere'. (Kureishi 1990)

'It is just a house, not a home'. ('Glass Concrete And Stones': Soundtrack, *Dirty Pretty Things*).

Introduction

Global cities figure predominantly in worldwide debates over citizenship, race, and national community, especially as urban migrant and immigrant populations grow. New arrivals - or old arrivals who 'look' or are classified as 'new' - repeatedly cross back and forth over the narrow line that divides 'alien' from 'citizen.' This essay illuminates two different treatments of this difficult crossing: black Briton Zadie Smith's humorous novel *White Teeth* (2000) and British director Stephen Frears' thriller film, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002)ⁱ. Seemingly, these two examinations of the 'new' Britain could not be less alike: one is grounded in liberalism and creolized nationalismⁱⁱ and presents a London where immigrants and their children struggle to make or find a home, even if somewhat chaotically; the other speaks about globalization and depicts London as one of many world cities, filled with subterranean passages, nobodies, non-citizens, and sojourners, all of them just trying to stay alive and avoid deportation. One tells the story of the Anglophone 'empire' enjoying a rightful, if tumultuous, return to the *metropole*, the other focuses on the messier borderless world, and on people who come from every conceivable location.

The juxtaposition of these two texts raises questions, in the end, about the limits of a liberal discourse like multiculturalism, embodied here by Smith's text. Zadie Smith described her first novel *White Teeth* in the following words: 'You can have a country which is still one

country but is full of a huge variety of people, cultures, religions, lifestyles, and they still have one history, because these people have decided to be part of a community togetherⁱⁱⁱ. A country or nation is often assumed to represent people of common origin or ethnicity: here Smith redefines nationalism in Habermasian fashion as the collective's desire to be part of a community, and this voluntary membership bonds Britain's plural inhabitants (Habermas 1996)^{iv}. This population, she claims, 'decided' to live together and share 'one' history. *White Teeth*, indeed, maps out two families' genealogies from slavery, colonialism to contemporary London. This panoramic view sees the evolution of the concept of Britishness from a colonial model for British colonies in South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean to emulate, to a composite national identity in Britain, where the constructed boundaries between former colonizers and colonized often collapse. The familiarity of Bangladeshi immigrant Samad Iqbal with British history and literary imagination illustrates well the intertwined histories of the commonwealth with the motherland. In England, he carves a space for himself and his family by demanding the inclusion of his faith and customs within British institutions and in the process he redefines Britain. Like Samad, Smith argues for the recognition and rights of immigrants and their descendants, a largely marginalized constituency particularly vulnerable to stereotyping and invisibility.

But liberalism, rights-talk, and creolized nationalism account only for individuals who are citizens or legal immigrants, and are only part of many forms of creolization that are taking place in Britain. Edouard Glissant's definition of creolization in his *Caribbean Discourse* (1992) is especially illuminating with regard to its diverse conceptualizations:

Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the crosscultural process ... To assert people are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct in this way the category of

'creolized' that is considered as halfway between 'two' pure extremes ... If we speak of creolized cultures (like Caribbean culture, for example) it is not to define a category that will by its very nature be opposed to other categories ('pure' cultures), but in order to assert that today infinite varieties of creolization are open to human conception, both on the level of awareness and on that of intention: in theory and in reality. (Glissant 1992:140)

This definition displaces creolization from a 'natural category' to a creative way of thinking and relating to others, challenging biological genealogies. Smith's text portrays this shift from a genealogical conceptualization of nation to a civic one, centered on citizenship responsibilities and rights. However, if multiculturalism argues for the toleration of differences – religious and cultural – it does little to grant equal rights to all citizens, nor does it bridge the social gap between citizens and non-citizens.

The re-conceptualization of Britain by Samad, and more largely by Black British writers comes at a specific moment when new migrations are changing Britain's large cities^v. Before the 1990s, immigrants came largely from the British Commonwealth, Ireland, India, Pakistan, and the Caribbean. This is no longer the case. Today, people living in large British cities increasingly come from countries whose histories do not necessarily intersect with Britain's. Moreover, the clampdown on migration flows has entailed a surge in illegal immigration. These faces are generally absent from novels focusing on immigrants such as Smith's novel. In contrast, set in a bleak hidden London, Stephen Frears's film *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) showcases the life of migrants who do not share Samad's stakes in domesticating this city. In fact, the film's two main protagonists, Turkish Senay and Nigerian illegal immigrant Okwe do not settle in Britain, for their illegal status maintains them in a bricked up underground system. Other migrants, like the

Somali father, “swap their insides for a passport”^{vi} to become fraud citizens. In this sense, London here is no different from any other global cities – New York, São Paulo, or Paris. When we compare the novel and the film, London (and more largely Britain) emerges as a house with two doors, each apparently granting different access to its inhabitants.

These contrasting approaches to the arrival of the world in London are not just a chapter in a single British story. They are features in the story of France, the United States, Italy, Australia, South Africa, and even Canada. They are a central facet of 'empire' to borrow from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Hardt and Negri 2000), where the lines between First World and Third World get jumbled. It is the story of how we try and fail, to make room for newcomers, choosing instead to limit, or slow, their inclusion, forcing them to become, in some cases, good citizens, arguing for rights, and in other cases, to become nobodies, with no argument at all. In the popular British view, represented here by Smith's *White Teeth* and Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things*, these two imaginaries neither overlap nor interact. No migrant in the film fights for the recognition of his or her culture, religion, or language, nor does he or she speak about the past and the future in Britain. On the other hand, the novel depicts no immigrant living underground and hiding his identity, harassed by immigration services or with reason to hide. The truth, however, is far more complicated, the story not so neat or clean. While the novel shows Samad Iqbal exhibiting the portrait of his great grandfather, Mangal Pande, in a London pub and campaigning for the inclusion of his faith and cultural practices at his sons' school, the film ignores British institutions and portrays instead diverse migrant workers sharing a common fake driver's license, whose picture corresponds to none of them. By focusing on the issue of self-identification, this article exposes a significant overlap between seemingly separate portraits of multicultural London, and demonstrates the existence of various political conceptualizations

of creolization – one that is bound to space, time, and aimed at national institutions, and another which consists of temporary coalitions that transcend national and cultural forms of kinship and is fashioned by a marginalized population.

Citizenship and national identity (feeling British) have rarely meant full entry or participation into the nation, and in that regard, new migrants from the Third World, post-war immigrants, and their descendants share much in common. Numerous politicians have used immigration as a political tool for advocating national preferences, as well as lamenting the presence of 'dark' hordes invading white Europe. The conflation of race and immigration remains a key variable in understanding the history of British nationalism, and the outsider position of minorities in Britain. While many of these immigrants are citizens, their race continues to mark them as foreign and inassimilable. Along with Zadie Smith, some writers such as Hanif Kureishi propose through their texts a reexamination of what it is to be British when one's phenotype marks one as 'other', when one's religion is not Christianity, and when one's customs and lifestyles are represented as exotic or problematic. The discussion of identity politics in Black British literature is vital in recognizing ignored lived experiences, but a text such as *White Teeth* which has London as a central setting also gives us the impression that it has frozen in time and consists mainly of white British, new Commonwealth immigrants from Asia, Africa or the Caribbean, and their offspring – and more significantly that its inhabitants seek to participate in a more inclusive nationalist agenda. The recurrent absence of new migrants in Black British texts may be more circumstantial than intentional, as many of these texts belong to the *bildungsroman* genre (*Lara* by Bernadine Evaristo, *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi to name only two). They also focus on a time familiar to their author, which rarely goes beyond the 1980s-

1990s^{vii}. As a result these authors stress primarily issues of citizenship, diversity, and pluralist nationalism.

Despite the post-World-War II influx of nominally white immigrants from Ireland and Eastern Europe, the heated debates on migration hypnotically fixed themselves on the presence of coloured immigrants in Britain. The 1948 British Nationality Act that provided legal status to all Commonwealth immigrants revealed the fragility of the meaning of citizenship, as it granted the British nationality, but not equality of access to housing and employment. Citizens of colour found themselves in a liminal space, where their legal status described them as British yet did not guarantee them the rights of Britons. Caribbean writers living in London in this period, such as George Lamming, Earl Lovelace, and Sam Selvon documented these perceptions of black settlers. As Fanon put it in his study on blackness, they were 'sealed into that crushing objecthood' (Fanon 1967: 109) for 'the white man...imprisoned them' (112). The race of these immigrants, no matter their social status, curtailed their citizens' rights. As Britain invited commonwealth immigration, it nevertheless constructed blackness and Britishness as inherently exclusive. For these early West Indian writers, John Clement Ball notes that:

When [they] represent London as a world of faceless buildings, closed doors, cramped interiors, limited mobility, and constrained, disconnected lives, they imply that the divisive binaries and excluding borders associated with colonialism have extended into the very metropolitan space that was supposed to offer the colonial subject expanded opportunities and a break from the past. (Ball 2004:110-111)

The continued legacy of colonial discrimination in the *metropole* disillusioned these Caribbean novelists who expected doors and, by extension, life options to open and instead found that their colour confined them within limited social spaces.

Citizens, yet visibly 'others' the coloured immigrants became an easily identifiable scapegoat against whom political parties mobilized at election times. The articulation of political debates about race since the 1960s have focused on limiting the so-called problem of coloured immigration. Accompanying these political discourses, images of the other that identify him/her as dangerous and different pervaded the media. Some of these visual images were of the race riots in American cities following Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, a perfect backdrop for politician Enoch Powell's speech on the dangers of immigration at the time when the United Kingdom opened its doors to thousands of Asian British citizens expelled from East Africa (Leggett 2000: 83). Powell virulently attacked the government's decision:

The immigrant communities can organise to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and ill-informed have provided. As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see, 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'. That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect.

(Powell 1991: 379)

This speech and its backdrop set up citizenship as a privilege that the 'unassimilable' portion of the American and British population – African Americans, and Asian British subjects – should not enjoy. Powell's populist speech fomented fear in his white working-class audience, as it implies the future domination of the newcomers who seek 'to campaign against their fellow citizens'. By capitalizing on images of chaos in the American riots, Powell used race to forge a threatened national identity and deny non-white subjects their rights to full citizenship. The

speech also denies that the history of slavery and colonialism accounts for the presence of new commonwealth citizens in Britain, and insists instead on an American exceptionalism.

Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's policies and rhetoric (1978-1990) exacerbated what Black British writers, filmmakers, and visual artists called a conflation between blackness and criminality, immigration, and ultimately illegitimacy. Fiction writers such as Johnson Linton Kwesi (1975), Hanif Kureishi (1990), Bernadine Evaristo (1997), and Zadie Smith (2001) revisit these loaded historical moments to expose 'the effects of racism both in its relationship with nationalism and in relation to the nationalist historiography' (Gilroy 1993: 63). *White Teeth* makes Enoch Powell's speech the reason for the Iqbal family's move to a 'safer' neighborhood, and follows the hectic growth of their twins during the Thatcher years. One such instance describes Samad's son, Millat, struggling with his invisibility in a 1980s Britain torn with racial tensions:

Millat was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's job; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives; that he should go back to his own country; that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they have recently been murdered. In short, he knew he had *no face* in this country, no voice in the country, until the week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized the anger, thought it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands. (my emphasis, 234)

In a context where national identity is constructed against a portion of its citizens, every document about the 'other' becomes political. The infamous *fatwa* declared on Salman Rushdie,

after the publication of his novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), is better understood in this climate of tensed racial hostilities. Unaware of the text's content, Millat only perceives it as another instance of 'us' versus 'them.' Race – here Millat's amorphous face – functions as a shifting empty signifier, evoking a contradictory set of prejudices that blends together citizens, immigrants, and migrants, but which paradoxically creates room within the concept of British citizen for the non-white, non-Christian newcomer. This incident, among many in the novel, serves as a plea for a new configuration of national identity. Smith's liberal project is to reconceptualize British history as nothing more or less than a commitment, despite a diversity of origins, to a single nation, supplanting the 'ethnic' with the 'civic' conception of community.

For this purpose, the novel attempts to 'dig up' national roots. As evoked in the epigraph, 'What's past is prologue,' from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the novel first dashes from slavery, to colonialism, to World War II, and in the second part stops and shrinks its lens to a neighborhood of North London, Willesden, where consequently Bangladeshi, Jamaican immigrants and their offspring struggle with identity questions. These two parts of the novel chart a colonial legacy for the generation born of immigrant parents and rooted in England. The text's expansive history enveloping several continents, uncovers the foundation of the British Empire and makes sense of its long intimate history of exchange and proximity. This archaeological search with the centrality of genealogies in the text – even though challenged by ideological kinships – fits rightly with Smith's agenda of reappropriating the past to demonstrate, not diverse 'pure' cultures, but instead the existence of an always hybrid Britishness whose meaning was crafted in the liminal space between the *metropole* and its periphery.

Despite their different status in Britain, many of the sojourners, migrants and other temporary workers share a similar confined space with other permanent minority immigrants in

London – a phenomenon which Avtar Brah explains as follows: 'Diaspora space is inhabited not only by diasporic subjects but equally by those who are constructed and represented as "indigenous" ' (16). Revealingly, the space of low-income jobs, poor housing and discrimination overlaps between *White Teeth*'s description of immigrants' lives and *Dirty Pretty Things*'s portrait of migrants' experiences. Cramped spaces, with cockroaches in the Iqbals' house; brown water running in Senay's tiny studio; both draw a picture of precariousness to the extent that place become imbued with a set of values.

Reminiscent of Du Bois' project in 1903 to merge 'colour' and nationality, more than a century later, Smith's project of merging of 'colour' and Britishness is sadly still necessary. For Smith, the common immigrant has made his final passage and settled home in Britain, and it is this immigrant dilemma, as 'the eternal victim of an essence, of an appearance,' the filtering of his identity through a veil of racial fantasies that the text is deconstructing (Fanon 1967: 35). *White Teeth* highlights these faulty associations and presents the Iqbal twins as a case in point. After World War II, Samad Iqbal, a British subject from India who fought the war along with Englishman Archie Jones, settles in London and works at a relative's restaurant as a waiter. As a strict Muslim, in theory more than practice, Samad is concerned about his two sons born in London, and wishes to send them back to Bangladesh where they will escape the corrupting values of the West. Eventually, his son Magid is sent back and receives a Muslim education, yet the latter, unlike his London-bound brother Millat, does not take up Islam, nor traditional Bangladeshi customs, he instead embraces British modernity, specifically, science and cloning. The failure of Samad's experiment demonstrates the increasing difficulty of locating hermetic identities. It is worth mentioning that the protagonists of Frears' film do not enjoy the mobility

granted to Majid and Millat by their passports, and remain subjected by their illegal status to bleak perimeters and prospects.

Samad, a representative of a diaspora in Britain – a visible established community with a distinctive ethnic culture – fervently inscribes his community in the space he inhabits. A former biology student, Samad is nevertheless a staunch representative of the strict genealogy of his 'blood,' a term which he easily substitutes with his Islamic faith. The text portrays, often satirically, his fears of cultural dilution through the assimilation of his children to Britain, it 'makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, peanuts, compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, disappearance' (327). This anxiety of invisibility moves him to carve his name, 'IQBAL,' in gigantic letters drowned in his own blood on a London bench after leaving work where he accidentally cut himself. Samad literally writes his name on Britain and hoists his great-grandfather's picture in its public spaces, rooting himself there. Unlike Millat's rejection of his Bangladeshi ancestry, his father Samad uses the portrait of his great-grandfather Mangal Pande's face to widen British conception of its history. Samad emphasizes his longevity in O'Connells' poolhouse owned by Abdul-Mickey when he demands the right to display the effigy of his relative on the wall, transforming the place into an interactive museum. Indeed, the image of a long lost genealogy of resistance to British imperialism is not enough; what Samad seeks is the reinterpretation of the rebellion led by his ancestor, 'the battle for the latter's reputation,' in short, the recognition of an Indian as a hero of British history (248, 250).

Samad's campaigns for the recognition of his faith and his ancestry are public ones aimed at transforming British institutions (the pub, the British education system). As a parent diligently involved in his sons' education, he campaigns for an increase of Muslim holidays in the school

calendar, and the addition of Indian music to the curriculum. In fact, Samad's affair with his sons' teacher can be read as a symbolic cultural infiltration of the British education system, a setting where normative behaviours are crucial in shaping future citizens. As an immigrant, Samad realizes that the only way to be part of his children's future is by claiming the place they inhabit. His concern, shared by Smith, is primarily with the psycho-dynamics and national psychologies inherent in the representation of the 'other.'

This desire for visible cultural or historical recognition is not necessarily sought out by all of London's inhabitants. The participation and investment in a society, a commitment, Smith might say to the community, often presupposes a desire to settle permanently. This is not true for many sojourners and migrant workers. Choosing world cities with easy travel connections to other large cities, migrants often seek employment that bestows mobility. *Dirty Pretty Things* displays protagonists who benefit in some ways even as they lose in others from their invisibility. The London described by Frears, like other large cities, 'concentrate[s] a growing share of disadvantaged populations' which renders cities 'strategic terrain for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions' (Sassen 2006: 87). Frears' film emphasizes the invisible and hopeless lives of these 'nobodies' on which London thrives as it literally feeds on them,

Dirty Pretty Things surveys a world of stifling hotel kitchens and dreary urban lanes where illegals toil in sweatshops [...] this is the London, Frears has remarked, that the rest of Britain fears and would like to pretend doesn't exist. The same fear has existed ever since the industrial revolution filled East London with cheap immigrant labor, turning it into a 'nether world,' 'a city of the damned'. (Cooper 2003: 25)

Most of the foreign workers in the film occupy the margin of the city; they enter backdoors, back kitchen, walk dark abandoned alleyways, long half-lit corridors and circulate

generally underground. Okwe, a Nigerian undocumented immigrant living in London works, among many jobs, as a taxi driver in a Caribbean-managed agency. Handing his fellow cabman a driver's licence, Okwe points at his cross, and warns him, 'careful, now your name is Mohamed'. The combination of a Muslim name with the Christian cross would raise suspicion or visibility, as in London the name defines expectations of faith, beliefs, and even attitudes. Nevertheless for these migrant workers, this name is an empty signifier that they can all share for identification purposes. Used as a survival strategy, this surface piece of identification gives no access to its temporary owner's culture, faith, or sets of customs. The name 'Mohamed' – one of the most common Muslim names, yet a problematic one if one lives in Europe or the United States especially post 9/11 – does not refer to an original person but is rather a fiction that hides several persons and denotes the drivers' status as interchangeable commodity. This set of floating identities renders the discussion of citizenship meaningless. Contrary to what happens in *White Teeth*, national identity here is something to be exploited, or traded; real identity is kept secret from the state and there is no attempt at all in the movie to meld the personal (ethnicity, language, etc) and the national into anything.

Constructed by the local context, these exploited migrants seize on this interchangeability, devising a local and temporary network of solidarity. Unlike Pande's picture, which stems from Samad's devotion to his faith and his desire to institutionalize his legacy, the driver's license is a testimony to temporary coalitions that transcend national, and cultural forms of kinship. Reminiscent of Stuart Hall's notion of 'black' as a 'new ethnicity' this coalition also derived from the 'common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organization of a new politics of resistance among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities' (Hall 1996: 163). Although Hall

applies this notion in the context of West Indians' and South Asians' political coalition against racism in the Thatcher era, this concept, which he claims is not definitive, is especially relevant in an even more diverse London setting today, where an increasing number of migrants from disadvantaged regions share low-income jobs.

Contrasting with Paul Gilroy's notion of the 'Black Atlantic', Hall's 'black experience' is local rather than transnational, used by a large alienated and class-bound group rather than a cosmopolitan circle of intellectuals or artists (Gilroy 1993: 15). More significantly, Hall's concept redefines blackness as a political response to an experience rather than an identification with a 'race' or a geographical provenance. The reappropriation of blackness, a stigma historically created to divide and hierarchize populations along colour lines, is a radical and powerful strategy that turns on its head its historical use and highlights the shared interests of diverse groups rather than their attachment to an ethnicity. A staunch critic of the nation-state, Gilroy, emphasizes diaspora and therefore tends to downplay the realities of citizenship and institutional roles in shaping the majority of individuals' identities. Diaspora however is not a place, and even transnational experiences are grounded in the nation-states individuals inhabit, or pass through. Aware of the nation's influence on diasporic subjects, the narrator of *White Teeth* presents the re-vision of Mangal Pande's figure as a strategy for Samad, 'distressed and full of the humiliation of the decade', to cope with his marginalization, his sense of powerlessness, or the contradictions of his life: a college educated waiter, a hen-pecked patriarch, and a Muslim with a 'mutinous body' that desires western women (249). Samad, a man of the past threatened by dissolution in London, finds in his cross-racial friendship with Englishman Archie someone who understands and values him, not despite his difference, but *as* different.

While Samad' and the film's low-paid workers of the global cities employ different survival strategies, their presences as immigrant are tied to the heart of the former Empire. Anthony King notes that the study of cities 'as directly linked to colonialism is the necessary prerequisite for understanding the development of cities as 'directly linked to the world economy' (King 8). As a matter of fact, the social, ethnic, and spatial division of London's core versus periphery population changed little from the arrival of post-war immigrants – who were concentrated in inner-city areas and occupied the low-paid, physically demanding jobs – to the arrival of the new global labour attached to London's growth as a world city. Moreover, as King duly points out, in London, a large number of jobs that are low paid and manual such as custodial service, are held by women and immigrants who overwhelmingly come from underprivileged regions such as Latin America.

Due to their embodied visibility they have been the target of police surveillance and brutality – especially in the case of Jamaicans – for decades, in numerous cases leading to riots. London in the mid 80s, actually hosted one fourth of the whole police establishment of the country (King, 1990: 148). Race, here, often trumps other forms of status such as national citizen, immigrant, or temporary resident. When Samad's twins accompany their half-white, half-Jamaican friend Irie to visit an old (white) man as part of a school activity, Millat, Majid and Irie are told through a half-closed door that 'I have no money whatsoever; so be your intention robbing or selling I'm afraid you will be disappointed' (168-9). Not until the children give several proofs of their identity and their connection to the respectable figure of their teacher does Mr. Hamilton let them in. *Dirty Pretty Things* invests even far more time in scrutinizing the institutional means of coercion which shape migrants' lives. In fact, much of the film's tension builds on an anxious game of hide-and-seek between the Immigration Enforcement Directive and

the protagonists. The chambermaids entering the hotel are also screened, this time through a camera that records their faces, the date and the time they arrive. The flashing faces disclose a racially heterogeneous – yet all non-white – group. The face-image in both cases stands for their identity – as criminals for the children visiting Mr. Hamilton, and as on-time custodial workers in the second. Michel Foucault's notion of visual surveillance is particularly fitting here. He notes that 'the exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effect of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible' (Foucault 1995: 170-1). The fear of camera recording enforces the chambermaids' timeliness as well as productivity because they internalize the possibility of being observed while working. As a receptionist, Okwe is responsible for changing the tapes registering the transits to and from the hotel entrance door, and watching the circulation inside and outside the hotel on several screens. Yet numerous backdoors to the hotel are purposely left unsupervised and opened to a few migrants who enter but never leave. The actions which escape these recordings, but which the film viewer has access to, occur behind the hotel's closed doors. Organ trafficking, prostitution, rape, beating, and death are a *mise en abyme* of a world within another world.

The power induced by these mechanisms of surveillance is also at play with custom documentation. Immigration agents storm through Senay's apartment, follow her movement, and hand pictures of her around factories to enforce her 'discipline' to the law. Yet surveillance in the film displays these immigrant officers as ineffective, while migrants make effective use of surveillance technology. These two instances of surveillance in these respective texts reflect the different position of these authors. Smith upholds the liberal view that racism and exclusion, though executed through institutional means, are primarily a problem of fear, ignorance, and

greed. Frears, on the other hand, looks at exclusion as part of the state system, an instrument of capitalism. Frears' characters are not only confined economically but administratively, by the lack of documentation. In one memorable closing scene, Okwe confronts a white wealthy British man – and by extension the viewer whom he engages in a direct address – and encapsulates the entire film in his comment, 'we are the people you don't see, we are the people who drive your cars, clean your rooms and suck your cocks'. This invisibility coincides with the absence of a moral obligation beyond the nation's border, and the underworld occupied by these non-nationals is one of wretchedness and anarchy, a space where, according to Okwe's friend, Guo Yi – who works at the morgue – 'you don't have a position [legal status], you have nothing, you are nothing'.

Seeking to escape these prisons of administrative identification, the protagonists of *Dirty Pretty Things* are always on the move, framed through numerous scene cuts and fast camera movements as they flow from one space to the other. Okwe and Senay do not sleep, they only toil and run. The settings are themselves transitory places where further documentation is required: airports, hotels, and cafés. Constantly changing, the lives of the protagonists only allow for short-term allegiances, here that of Okwe and Senay, whose encounter and separation demarcate the beginning and the end of the movie. The kinship of these protagonists has no past, unlike Samad's genealogical tree, it is always 'becoming'. Like Deleuze and Guattari's 'nomad thought', these workers are a unit whose composition 'is fluid, to say the least, and does not follow any clear unilineal or cognatic descent system' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 26-27). Identities in Frears' film have global, rather than national perimeters. The local map of London is reconfigured through Okwe's transnational experiences into a world map. Geographical spaces become imbued with political meanings, such as when Okwe, after saving the life of a Somali

immigrant butchered after a backroom operation, said he was in Africa. Similarly, when Senay asks him why a doctor in Nigeria became a hotel receptionist in London, Okwe replies that it is an 'African story'. The use of 'Africa' in this specific context, suggests a space of marginalization, exploitation, corruption, poverty and despair, superimposed on an affluent London: this is Africa in London, a cursed rather than a promised land. As a mediating lens, 'Africa' not only makes sense of Okwe's environment and influences the way he relates to others, it also impacts cultural formations in London. In King's words,

[...] culture, to a larger or lesser extent, is incorporated by capital. Yet in this respect, the world city also had its contradictions. At once a centre for the production and diffusion of a 'Western' mass culture, it is also, through the diversity of its peoples, its ethnicities, its sub-cultures, its alternative cosmopolitanisms, its representations of both core and periphery, also an instrument for changing that 'Western' culture and also, indeed, for changing the culture of the country wherein the world city is located. It is not only the economy which is being restructured but, also, the nature of national culture and identity. (1990: 150)

While migrants and sojourners influence British culture, they are not privy to a more insightful vision of British society, nor are they immune from racial and class prejudices. Most migrants travel with baggage of their own cultural prejudices assembled in their country of origin and picked up along the way to their new destinations. Frears' portrayal of an underground exploitation is not systematically that of white over black, citizens over non-citizens, Commonwealth over new immigrants. Sneaky the hotel manager, a Spaniard, prospers by exploiting this underclass through prostitution, and organ trafficking for which illegal immigrants receive fake passports. The boss of the sweatshop, who is of South-East Asian

descent, similarly exploits female workers economically and sexually, while the Russian doorman buys the favours of Black British prostitute Juliet every week. A British citizen, Juliet, interestingly, circulates in the same underground as the rest of the guestworkers and comments that she does not exist. British Caribbean workers are seen in the back rooms of hospitals, and taxi places, suggesting the shared experiences of a racialized labour. This continued social and spatial polarization inherited from colonization also accounts for placing 'different kinds of migrants in very different situations of power and lack of it, irrespective of their relation to the (economic) labor market' (King, 2006: 322).

Dirty Pretty Things remarkably resurrects the invisible side of the global city. Saskia Sassen notes that 'mainstream accounts have the effect of evicting cities, communities, and workers from the story of today's advanced economy' (Sassen 2006: 83). *Dirty Pretty Things* not only reverses this trend, but also calls for 'the possibility of a new politics of traditionally disadvantaged actors, a new politics that operates in this new transnational economic geography, whether the actors are factory workers in export processing zones or cleaners on Wall Street' (83). These non-integrated individuals share much in common with Okwe, a former doctor who works as a taxi driver and receptionist, and even college-educated Samad in *White Teeth*, who is a waiter. Solidarities happen among this heterogeneous group breaking down traditional forms of kinship. The film, with Senay and Okwe, presents such a pair whose friendship transcends race, gender and age differences.

Juxtaposing these various conceptualizations of creolization in Britain through the national framework of *White Teeth*, and the informal and temporary coalitions in *Dirty Pretty Things* underlines the texts' respective limits on representing multicultural London. The novel articulates national identity as the primary vector through which people understand who they are,

how they relate to one another and identify themselves, and leaves out a considerable portion of the population for whom the nationalist perspective cannot account for their local, and transnational identities. The nationalization of the commonwealth migration in *White Teeth* participates in a new more inclusive nation-building, yet as a nation-building project, it leaves in the shadow exactly those who do not fit a genealogical British past: the non-British, and the non-commonwealth citizens. The novel's juxtaposition with the film highlights the limits of liberal claims to an expansive Britishness. Liberalism's scope with its advocacy of equal rights for citizens is not only unattainable; it cannot bridge the gap between these two populations, and therefore proves itself incapable of addressing inequalities in this global age. The film, on the other hand, leaves unaddressed the assimilation of immigrants to British society, the gains of their political claims, and their civic struggles against racism, and more diverse representation. Unlike the novel, *Dirty Pretty Things* does little to question stereotypical representations of ethnic groups and may in fact reaffirm them: Senay is a shy introverted Muslim girl, the Caribbean men in the taxi-led agency are hypersexual, Okwe's Chinese friend is familiar with Buddhist rituals, Black British Juliet is a prostitute, etc. The accumulation of these signs draw an image of the metropolis as a spectacle rendered by exotic protagonists and may substantiate racist fantasies such those disseminated by Enoch Powell about migration flooding western cities. Moreover, the somewhat cohesive marginal migrants showed in the film may be a utopian view of London migrant population divided along national, religious, and ethnic lines epitomized in the novel with Samad's encounter with Mad Mary. Samad indeed explains to Mad Mary that they are both 'split people' but despite their common colonial experience, 'your past is not my past and your truth is not my truth and your solution – it is not my solution' (179). Taken together, the novel and the film offer us a variety of conceptualizations of identities which

troubles our traditional understanding of community, and sheds light on the current transformation British culture from the bottom up.

Anchored in the history of British immigration, the different uses of identity documents in *White Teeth* and *Dirty Pretty Things* expose the overlap of racial surveillance, and cross-racial community formation between nationalist and nomadic narratives. Studying these two representations of diversity together also reveals the paradox of the nation-state. On the one hand, it grants citizenship and state protection to its citizens (although what Hannah Arendt calls 'a right to have rights' is not equally distributed). On the other hand, it controls and subjugates non-citizens, limiting their freedom of movement and regulating all aspects of their lives: where they work, and when they enter and depart the country (296). Migrants, guest workers and other sojourners are identified, controlled and localized through passports. With the current development of biometrics, their photography, physiological measurements, and finger prints enter international databases enabling an even greater surveillance. We would certainly benefit from considering the two doors of this house together, their different modes and degrees of access, because as Senay remarks about the plumbing in the bathroom and the kitchen of her tiny studio, 'everything here is connected to everything there'. Citizenship and non-citizenship are not self-enclosed statuses, but overlapping processes that are codependent.

If the status of immigrants, migrants and sojourners tends to overlap, Smith's and Frears' projects on the other hand share little in common. Their concerns as well as their politics are at odds. Multiculturalism, a byproduct of liberalism, posits a broad conception of rights that include immigrants' histories, cultures, and traditions within the nation and fail to disclose the underworld of 'nobodies' on which Britain's service economy flourishes. With its declining birth rates and its dependence on cheap labor, Europe must allow immigrants in, yet struggles to

reconcile its unattainable ideals of equality with the exploitation of large numbers of those non-subjects that it fails to integrate. Furthermore, capital's crisis contributes to the dramatic surge of illegal immigrants, and European government's' repressive stances on illegal immigrants turns them into criminals, and prohibits any concrete discussion of migrants' rights, sealing the door behind which this population remains invisible.

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ⁱ Zadie Smith identified herself as a black and English writer in a National Public Radio interview by Liane Hansen on June 25, 2005. In the late 1970s, early 1980s, the term 'black' referred to a strategic coalition against racism among African, and South East Asian descent individuals in Britain, today it is rather 'Britishness' which is reconceptualized by these writers.

ⁱⁱ I use the phrase Creole nationalism here to describe the British civic nationalist project that attempts to acknowledge diverse cultural values and traditions, what Smith in her 2005 interview (see note 3) called 'the multiplicity within oneness', moving away from ethnic nationalism.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hansen, Liane. Interview with Zadie Smith. '*Weekend Edition Sunday*', National Public Radio. 25 June 2005.

^{iv} I use the term nation as meaning, in Nenad Miscevic's terminology, 'a cultural group, possibly united by a common descent, endowed with some kind of civic ties' (Miscevic 200 5).

^v The Black British writers I refer to, are born in England, for instance Hanif Kureishi (1990), Zadie Smith (2001), and Bernadine Evaristo (1997).

^{vi} Okwe's words in the film.

^{vii} Texts such as Smith's *White Teeth*, Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and Evaristo's *Lara* draw much from the biography of their authors.